Anno 1778.

PHILLIPS·ACADEMY

OLIVER·WENDELL·HOLMES

LIBRARY

Per ampliora ad altiora.

THE ROUGON-MACQUART

L'Assommoir

VOL. I

A. Robaude

Chapter III

On the Place des Victoires there was a stoppage. The bride's left shoe-lace had come undone; and as she tied it up at the foot of the statue of Louis XIV., the couples came close up behind her, joking, as they waited, on the bit of ankle that she shewed.

THE MASTERPIECES OF

EMILE ZOLA

L'Assommoir

VOLUME I

NOW FIRST COMPLETELY TRANSLATED INTO ENGLISH BY ARTHUR SYMONS, WITH ETCHINGS AFTER PAINTINGS BY ALCIDE-THEOPHILE ROBAUDI

WITH INTRODUCTIONS BY

BENAIAH LONGLEY WHITMAN, D.D., LL.D.

Formerly President of Colby and Columbian Universities

AND

GOTTHARD DEUTSCH, PH.D.

Professor of Hebrew, Union College, Cincinnati

PRINTED FOR SUBSCRIBERS ONLY
FROM THE PLATES MADE BY THE LUTETIAN SOCIETY
OF LONDON

L
47205

843
Z7
v.1

THIS EDITION OF

The Rougon-Macquart

IS PRINTED

FROM THE TEXTUAL PLATES

MADE BY

The Lutetian Society
OF LONDON

NOTE

BY THE LUTETIAN SOCIETY

THE Society proposes to issue to its members translations of such representative master-pieces of fiction by Continental authors as are unprocurable in English in an unmutilated rendering. These translations will be the work of scholars, and each volume will be presented in similar style to the present one.

The editions will in every case be strictly limited, and will not be offered to the ordinary public.

"L'Assommoir" is the first of six novels from the Rougon-Macquart series, by Émile Zola; it will be followed by translations of "Nana," "La Curée," "La Terre," "Germinal," and "Pot-Bouille": these six works form the first issue of the Society to its subscribers. And it should be added that this series is the only complete, unexpurgated, and absolutely literal edition of M. Zola's novels as yet printed in the English tongue, and that it is issued by the special permission and under the direct auspices of M. Zola.

INTRODUCTION

SHALL we read Zola? That depends. If one is looking for fine writing merely, one may well pass him by. There is fine writing in Zola, but one has to search for it in order to find it, and in these busy days one can be better employed than in searching a novel for fine writing. If one is looking for stories that leave one as they find one, Zola will better be left alone. There is not one of his works that will leave a man as it found him. Every reader is better or worse for every book of Zola's that he reads. But if a man is looking for the record of life, and is prepared to take things as they are, there is no better guide than Zola.

It is well, therefore, to decide at the outset what one is looking for, when the question concerns Zola. For Zola is not fastidious. He is just truthful. There are not three of his works that one can read without a shudder. There is not one of them that a man can read without being made to think.

Zola always wrote with a purpose. Whether it was the ambitious purpose to write the history of the Second Empire in the history of a family,

Copyright, 1904, by B. L. Whitman

or the purpose of calling attention to ecclesiastical abuses, or the purpose of amending social and industrial conditions, the purpose was always present, and from it he never swerved. So we have the secret of the Rougon-Macquart series, the secret of the Trilogy, the secret of the Gospels.

Of the Rougon-Macquarts, Zola says: "I wish to show how a family, a small group of persons, comports itself amid the surroundings in which it is placed, expanding, and giving birth to ten, twenty, individuals who appear at first sight extremely dissimilar, but who, on examination, will be found to be intimately connected with each other. Heredity, the same as gravity, is governed by certain laws.

"Working from the individual to the social group, one is prepared to note the part of that group in history.

"The characteristic of the Rougon-Macquart family, the group I propose to study, is their unbridled passion, that great revolutionizing element of our age, inciting to excessive self-indulgence. Physiologically speaking, these appetites are the gradual outcome of certain nervous and sanguineous modifications which manifest themselves in a race of beings, as a consequence of some previous organic lesion, and which determine the sentiments, the desires, the passions of each individual of the race according to his surroundings; in short, all those natural and instinctive manifestations of human nature, which, in their results, assume the conventional names of virtues and vices. Historically speaking, these appetites originate with the

people, whence they spread to contemporary society, affecting all stages under the influence of that impulse, essentially modern, which is communicated to the lower classes during the progress of their social development, and they thus tell the story of the Second Empire, by the help of their individual dramas, from the perfidy of the Coup d'État to the treason of Sedan."

The beginning of the Rougon-Macquart family history is set in Adelaide Fouque, who, in wedlock and out, bore children to the man Rougon and to the man Macquart, whence the name of the series. There was irregularity in the life of this woman, due to morbid nervous conditions, and she ended her days in madness. The taint descended, as taints are likely to do, and the series of novels traces the effect. Scarcely a half-dozen of the descendants of the ill-fated woman escape their heritage from her. The summing up comes in Doctor Pascal, one of the very few normal persons of the group, and who, with the skill and knowledge of a physician, is able to review the family history.

In the Trilogy the problem of religion as determined by ecclesiasticism is treated. "Lourdes" exhibits the spiritual frenzy that develops from miracle. A spring at Lourdes was believed to be possessed of miraculous power because of a vision of the Virgin. Faith in the vision and in the efficacy of the waters grew, and pilgrimages became common. Into the faith, the passion, and the healings and failures of these the book leads us. "Rome" is a first-hand study of conditions in the Eternal City. The web

that is woven in the name of religion is followed in its intricate mazes through politics, education, and industry from Rome to the ends of the earth. "Paris" deals with the emancipation of spirit, and prophesies a day of life and spiritual power.

The Gospels take hold of the social and industrial problems of the day. "Fécondité" goes to the heart of France's sin of childlessness. "Travail" exhibits anew the evil so fully treated in "Germinal," the evil of conditions that leave two brothers of the flesh in the relation of master and man, without other bond of interest than the interest of wage and dividend. "Vérité" expounds the theme over which France and the world went wild in the Dreyfus case, showing the legitimate fruit of ignorance and prejudice, breaking a path toward the day when human relations will be the relations of truth. A fourth gospel was unfinished when death claimed the apostle. It was to bear the title "Justice," and, as far as men know, it was to treat the great question of racial emancipation.

Readers of Zola, therefore, may well recognize at the outset that the novels of the master are problem novels. Not only in the groups but in the individual work also there is always some problem to be solved. For instance, in "L'Assommoir" the author sets out deliberately to show what intemperance does. That story is an elaborate study of alcoholism. Neither the materials nor the characters are imagined. Zola simply found them and described them. He knew both Gervaise and Coupeau. He had seen womanhood decay as it decayed

in Gervaise. He had seen a brute die as Coupeau died. "Nana" is a history of the social evil as it does its work in high places. Zola saw a kind of retribution in such a character as Nana, corrupting as she had been corrupted. Here was a daughter of the people taking revenge for her own and the people's wrongs at the hands of an insolent plutocracy. "Germinal" deals with the brutalizing effect of unrelieved toil, the crushing of life by greed. "La Bourse" expounds the evil of speculation, with which France beyond most nations is familiar. "La Débâcle" pictures the fate of the unready, the downfall of a nation from pride and sheer political rottenness.

To Zola a book meant work. The material was gathered with painstaking care. Zola really studied his subject. He considered himself a physician of the social body, and his first care was to find out what ailed the body. He did not guess. He did not invent. He found and took. Before writing "Germinal," with its great mining strike, he visited Anzin, the coal district, where a strike was in progress. Before writing "L'Assommoir," he haunted the prisons and hospitals to complete the notes he had taken among the people he knew so well. Before writing "La Débâcle," he went over the fields he was to describe, taking with him men who had fought on those very fields. Before writing "Lourdes," he studied the problem on the ground, going to Lourdes and spending days with the people, sick and well, whose enthusiasms and hallucinations he was to treat.

This doubtless explains why one feels so often in reading Zola that the characters are real persons. The characters are real persons—renamed. Zola wrote as one who knew. If we object to what we find in his books, it is because we object to things as they are in life.

And that is Zola's justification for speaking as plainly as he habitually does. He does speak plainly. He does not represent an oath by a blank or a dash. He writes the oath down as the man uttered it. His characters fight and swear, and behave badly. But that is because people really do fight and swear and behave badly, and Zola's books are about *people*. Take Thérèse Raquin. There is a study in physiological psychology. Zola did not call it that, but that is what it is. Thérèse exists. Laurent exists. We have all seen them. What we have not all seen is the result when Thérèse and Laurent find each other. Zola has seen, and in his book he tells us what happens. Opinions differ as to the importance of knowing what will happen in such a case, but the result is certain, and those who care to know will find it clearly written in this book.

Is Zola immoral? Emphatically no, neither himself nor his works. It is worthy of note that the writer of the mightiest argument ever penned against intemperance and one of the mightiest against harlotry was himself a man of pure and simple life. Of "L'Assommoir" and the works following he says: "I have sought to picture the fatal downfall of a family of workpeople in the pestilential surroundings of our faubourgs. After drunkenness

and idleness come the loosening of family ties, the filth engendered by progressive forgetfulness of all upright sentiments, and then, as dénouement, shame and death. It is simply a lesson in morality." Again and again he insists that his purpose is truth. "Cross sections of reality" is what he calls his characterizations, "Morals in actions." So far from being immoral, it is nearer the truth to say that he is persistently, uncompromisingly, hideously moral. There have been men who loved ugliness and filth. Such men deal with ugliness and filth for their own sake. *One reads Zola to little profit who does not discover that his relation to sin is that of the physician to disease.* He recognizes the facts that he may deal with them effectively. He diagnoses that he may cure. That often means the uncovering of things that we should rather not look at. But if the things are there, it is better that we should see them. The worst of covering up evil is that the evil is still there, and it is still evil. Zola's way was to uncover. It is the diseased limb that should come off. But which is the diseased limb? Zola says: "This one." You look, and you say: "That is so." Then you know what to do. Of course, such knowledge is not for everyone. Certain of Zola's books are no more fit reading for the youthful mind, or, for that matter, for the average mind, than are certain medical works. But neither the medical works nor Zola need on that account be considered immoral.

Zola is not immoral, but he is plain-spoken. If a man does not care to know what is going on in the world about him, it is as well that he should not

read Zola. But if he does care to know, Zola can tell him. For Zola knows and makes others know. And when Zola shows a man a thing, there is no doubt about the man's having seen it. We may think that our author need not have so persistently chosen such subjects as he did, but he had his own problem and he had to work it out in his own way. Complaint of the proportion of space and strength given to matters of food and sex would do well to notice the proportion of space and strength given by modern society to matters of food and sex.

Zola's philosophy is not optimism. He sees the misery of the world too clearly for that. It is not pessimism. He has too large faith for that. It is meliorism, or the philosophy of betterment. Even when life is darkest, Zola is forever saying: "Notwithstanding the burden and the pain, we must not give up." He reminds us continually that the world holds something besides sin. If there were no Pierre in "Lourdes," and no Matthew in "Fécondité," no Luke in "Travail," and no Mark in "Vérité," we might despair. But Pierre and Matthew and Luke and Mark are there. And Pauline is there, in "La Joie de Vivre." So is little Jeanne in "Une Page d'Amour," and so is little Jeanne's mother. If there were nothing in the world but disease and death, a word of hope would be a mockery. But there is something besides disease and death. There is life. There is health. What keeps France alive in the midst of her appalling carelessness of death? It is life stronger than death. What keeps any people from the disaster that sin always courts?

Faith stronger than sin. How can sin be cast out? By being first known as sin, so that it can be hated and feared, and a cure sought in righteousness. Zola shows sin as it is. And he makes one hate it. In all his books, after the first grip of passion is past, evil stands out as a thing to be let alone. The writer of these lines read "L'Assommoir" in his young manhood, and after the reading he said: "Drunkenness is an accursed thing." He read "Nana" and said: "Impurity is an accursed thing." So of book after book. Zola never makes sin beautiful. Always and everywhere it is an instrument of death.

God was good to Zola in denying him his one ambition, and in giving him sudden death. His ambition was the Academy. Rejection was a boon, for it left him free to do his work in the only way it could be done. His death was as tragic as he could himself desire. He has no successor. He lived alone in his work, and when he died there was no one to take his place. But he did his work so well that he will keep men haunted with the questions he raised, and men will read his books because they tell the truth about a part of life that is very dark, but very real.

B. L. WHITMAN.

ZOLA AS A MORALIST

HYPOCRITICAL prudery is not morality and puerile reserve is not modesty. Morality does not consist in the conventional ignoring of the plague spots of social life. It is undoubtedly not to be desired that in everyday conversation the baser and the more repulsive of the human passions be brought into prominence and regarded as subjects of commonplace consideration. The Talmud is esteemed as the great moral teacher, but if we apply to it the pusillanimous measure that is often applied to great and eminent works of art and literature, it must be condemned and should be banned from society. It is in no spirit of levity that the Talmud is here introduced in the consideration of morality in literature.

Moral teaching is to be estimated not in the mere matter which forms the subject of an author, but in the evident and avowed purpose of the writer. Every moral teacher who has had a lesson for the world has presented in precise terms the plague he would reform. Nay in its undisguised nakedness. The very hideousness and malignancy of the cancer he would eradicate he expatiates on and presents with unfaltering pen. Did the earnest prophets of old

Copyright, 1904, by Gotthard Deutsch.

quail before the vices they denounced? Did they trim their words in fear that they would offend the general customs? Did the great Greek and Latin moralists wince before the immorality of their day and hold measured language and present faint pictures of the vices they would destroy? In modern times it is the same; the moralist may be sickened with the corruption he has witnessed, shocked at the vice he has seen rampant, but he has set his face to correct the corruption and the vice, and this he has best done by vigorously and truthfully presenting that corruption and that vice and convincing his hearers of their existence and the baneful and insidious results that follow their propagation; and just in proportion as he is honest in his purpose and fearless and outspoken in his evidences of the working of the evils he would reform is he able to arouse the consciences of his hearers. Mere contact with vice and the vicious is not an implication of immorality: identification of one's self with them is. The delicate Mrs. Fry was in close touch with vice and the vicious; she exposed them unsparingly, but neither the purity of her motives nor her morality could be even remotely suspected. To denounce vice in the abstract is but to beat the air. It is admitted that the taint of evil is innate in humanity, nay the natural man is prone to wickedness; how, then, can good be done by the moralist if he shrink from boldly hauling forth the hideous and vile and presenting them in their ghastly excesses, that the better part of man's nature may be aroused and reason be moved to take a stand against passion.

Have we not portrayed Zola and his purpose in these remarks? His purpose has been avowed in his works. Who shall presume to go behind his avowal and impute to him a purpose other than he proclaims? His knowledge of the evils and basenesses he portrays is no manner of warrant for disputing his title of a moral teacher. He would be unworthy the title of a moralist and a teacher of morality if he had not mastered the subject which he seeks to teach. There are two kinds of moral teachers: those who would try to elevate our weak and evil-bent natures by the picture of abstract goodness and the presentment of all the virtues; which plan may be compared to a setting forth of mere hygienic rules for those who are suffering from specific maladies; and those on the other hand, who, realizing that our inclinations are weak for good and despotic for evil, merely show us the goodness of the first but overwhelm us with the picture of the degradation and ghastly deformity of the latter by tracing the cause and effect of its permitted sway; and this plan may be compared to the wise physician who, familiar with specific maladies, seeks to overcome them by direct and heroic measures. Gentle platitudes in moral literature are pleasing pabulum for those suffering from ennui; but those who look for this will eschew Zola's works. His mind was fixed on a loftier purpose than to please the easy-going reader looking for mere entertainment only.

Had Zola any justification for the boldness of his literary methods? His critics do not, dare not,

challenge his truthfulness to nature; for he only wrote of conditions that exist, aye even abound in our society. They can only rail against his methods. Every reformer, from the Biblical prophets and messengers down to the latest social reformer, is open to the same attack. And the path of such has not generally been easy. Zola, then, is denounced for fearlessly throwing the lid off the cauldron in which vice is seething and bubbling. Its fumes offend the nostrils of the complacent, conservative persons who wish to believe that all is as it should be, or for the best. Zola is the missionary in literature; he does not smirkingly look on from his prebend's stall and deliver unctuous orations which shall not ruffle unduly the tender morality of the easy-going. He is the moral enthusiast who would quicken the dull conscience and stir the torpid heart of his hearers till their natures become aroused to the prevailing perversity and determined to put the evil thing from their midst. Zola was fired with zeal for the good. With the true missionary spirit he dashed into the very centres of evil, and still with the missionary spirit poured out his powers and his charity in aid of the unregenerated,—or the victims of self and society. As one writer aptly says: Zola's work is "a moral hurricane."

Where then in spirit or in method does Zola fail as a moral teacher? It is suggested that he is too real; he shocks the sensitive, delicately nurtured moralist. His energy is too drastic, his pictures too lurid, his details too naked, his subjects too extreme. He balks at no incidents, recoils at no sentiment,

applies no varnish to hide the defects of the social structure. He seeks not to picture an ideal state, he portrays what he finds. The good has plenty of expounders; the imaginary, many painters; virtue and goodness need but little praise, we like to recognize them, and yet, perhaps, they are rather regarded in concrete presentment with pity; vice and injustice must be dragged from their lurking places and pilloried and scourged before we are roused to the extent of fully recognizing their prevalence. Zola stirred up the mire of iniquity, falsehood, hypocrisy, tilted at conventional corruption, scorned the despotism of social proprieties, attacked venerable frauds, ridiculed unsubstantial beliefs, and shattered many idols; yet withal vice is repulsive in his pages, —repulsive in itself, and repulsive in the careers of its victims.

A sane mind will be fortified by contact with Zola's works and better equipped to combat evil and wrong, while the vacillating and ill-regulated one may be summarily aroused by the terrible pictures that he views to a realization of the misery and destruction attendant on the lives of those who are dominated by evil passions.

In his long series of novels describing the house of Rougon-Macquart, he attempted to open the eyes of society to the many ills from which it is suffering and which it is unwilling to admit to itself. The *débâcle* of Sedan was not undeserved. The corruption of politics was its immediate cause, just as a wild speculation had caused political rottenness, and as degeneracy of moral life has been the cause for

an unbridled desire for luxury and pleasure, which is underlying the savage passion for money and power. Zola tried to picture society, by the picture of a typical family during the two decades of Napoleon's government. The two factors, which create man's individuality,—inherited temperament on the one hand, and opportunity on the other,—were to be, as he himself said, "The Mathematical Thread" which leads from one man to another.

One mother and two fathers show us the whole range of various tempers, which present themselves to us in the various types of statesmen, financiers, mechanics, shopkeepers, hucksters, degenerate idlers, etc. Zola's critics have said that he tried to rival the clinic in his novels. Suppose he did. If poetry is the presentation of life, why should it not be permitted to present the pathological side of life? Suppose one of our friends should tell us a story of life within his own experience, something that happened either in his own family, or in the town in which he lived, and he should tell us of a mother, who was of a nervous temperament bordering on insanity, and whose sons presented peculiar features, either of a morbid desire for debauchery, sexual or religious insanity, violence or inclination to criminality, idiocy or enthusiastic love of utopian ideals, should we consider it as a natural everyday affair? And this is exactly what Zola did in his Rougon-Macquart series.

Adelaide Fouque was mentally somewhat abnormal, and the daughter of a father who died in insanity. She marries Rougon, a common peasant.

The son inherits to a certain extent the nervousness of his mother and to some extent the boorishness of his father. In him the two characters are combined, and exhibit themselves in a ravenous desire for wealth and political power, on the one hand, and in a sturdy energetic activity to reach his goal. Macquart, the father of Adelaide's other children, is a daring smuggler and poacher, and so, in this line criminality is predestined. Pierre Rougon marries the daughter of a bourgeois of a little town, whose ambition it is to enter higher society. This ambition assumes various forms in the children and grandchildren of this marriage. One becomes a statesman, one a financier, another, by a strange play of circumstances, becomes a cool scientific observer. Among the grandchildren we find socialistic agitators, prostitutes, criminals, drunkards, and so many other types, which, in the history of criminology, will always be seen to be the natural outcome of some abnormal ancestor. Ambition is predestined in the family. One of the brothers satisfies it in political life; unscrupulous, he has only the one ambition "to get there." Republic or monarchy would be all the same to him, if they offered him the opportunity to gain power. Another brother has the ambition of wealth. He knows no other goal worthy of his efforts. At that time the city of Paris becomes the theatre of a feverish agitation for building. Aristide Rougon, who assumes the name of Saccard, is the leading speculator in real estate. He is willing to become the husband of a disgraced woman, in order to gain the first

capital necessary for his speculation. That his son, growing up in such an environment should become a degenerate, is a logical necessity. Such a society, without any moral basis, is bound to collapse. Sooner or later, a government, based on people of the Rougon-Macquart type, must face a crisis and is bound to succumb to it. The moral condition of the middle class, which forms the greatest proportion of the cities, is graphically, although repulsively described in "Pot-Bouille." It is like the moral of the story of old Sodom. A putrified society is bound to perish. In showing this as the necessary course of conditions, Zola has justified his claim that he intended to construct a dam against debauchery.

He has given proof that the Idyll is not altogether strange to him. In his "Fault of Abbé Mouret," he has pictured to us the ideal of a village priest, living in a poor parish, which he chose for himself, and burning with the desire of living a life of evangelical purity. Zealous to work for the transformation of his morally corrupt flock, and spending his nights in mystic adoration of the Holy Virgin, he is still unable to resist the temptations of life.

One of the most important objections to Zola's literary work is his love of the detail. His detailed description of a woman's dress, the arrangements of a dinner table, the tools in a workshop, the vestments of the church, the fruit pyramids in the market hall, and all other details, which often seem tedious, as they also command our admiration for

a man who is a master of the facts and the terminology of so varying occupations in life—all this may seem overdone.

The reproach is made that Zola's work is immoral. No doubt he has presented to us, especially in "Nana," "Assommoir," and "Pot-Bouille," the debauchers whom we try to avoid, and who often fill us with a sense of both moral and æsthetic disgust. Every insane asylum and every jail, however, shows us the prevalence of exactly the same conditions which Zola depicts in every one of his books, and he has, in showing us the corruption of society, done greater work—nobler work—than his predecessors of the Romantic period, who, with their clever allusions, are certainly more apt to arouse sensuality than is Zola, with his brush of the intrepid artist.

One of the typical themes of Zola's work, which goes through the whole series of Rougon-Macquart and culminates in his "Fécondité," is his admiration of nature as life producing. In one of the volumes of the Rougon-Macquart series, he pictures the idealistic love of Sylvère and Miette, whom he brings together in a deserted cemetery. The description of the high grass, which rises up to their knees, the odor of the buds, inebriating the two young people with the charm of life, reads like a passage from Canticles, singing of the flowers that appear on the earth, the vines that give forth their fragrance, speaking the voice of love. The nature studies in "La Terre" are unexcelled. The pleasant charm

of the beauties of inanimate nature appealed to Zola irresistibly, and he could voice their glories with as sympathetic a tongue as he could speak the passions which he declared by his characters; and for the same reason—that he was a true observer and a faithful exponent of nature. In this admiration of the life of nature, which constantly regenerates itself, is found the key to Zola's work, which culminates in a new gospel of fecundity, work, truth, and justice.

He crowned his works by his advocacy of the cause of Captain Dreyfus. It was natural that Zola should be accused by a general of the French army of merely wanting to get material for a sequel to "La Débâcle." Even without the vindication of this victim of a reactionary conspiracy, the malice of such an accusation is patent. The Viscount de Vogue, who had fought in the war of 1870, testifies to the fact that Zola's description of camp life and of the French soldier is "irreproachable." In trying to vindicate Dreyfus, as well as in presenting the case of the ignominious defeat of France at Sedan, Zola was guided by his indomitable desire to attack conventionality and to expose hypocrisy. If he had been a man who did his literary work merely for the sake "of getting there," as Brunetiére claimed, he would certainly not have become the advocate of such an unpopular cause. His letter, *J'Accuse*, is an emblem of his whole life, advocating sincerity, self-confidence, honesty in private and public life, and denouncing hypocrisy, sham, immorality, and political corruption.

We may safely dismiss the charge of immorality as applied to Zola; his so-called morbid love of the baser examples of human nature is with better reason to be qualified as an overpowering love of the truth and a sincere purpose to decry the ignoble, the wicked, and the baneful. Whatever may be the future literary fame of Zola, he is to the present a star of the first magnitude. His works are for the individual reader, as well as the public conscience, a warning and a counsel.

GOTTHARD DEUTSCH.

PREFACE

LES ROUGON-MACQUART should consist of a score of novels. The general plan has been drawn up since 1869, and I follow it with extreme scrupulousness. L'ASSOMMOIR has come in its turn. I have written it, as I shall write the others, without swerving a hair's-breadth from my direct course. It is to this that I owe my strength. I have an aim before me, and I make straight for my aim.

When L'ASSOMMOIR appeared in a paper, it was attacked with unexampled brutality, denounced, accused of every crime. Is it really necessary for me to explain here, in a few lines, my intentions as a writer? I have endeavoured to paint the fatal downfall of a family of the working class, in the tainted atmosphere of our suburbs. After drunkenness and sloth, come a relaxation of family ties, the evils of over-crowding, the gradual lapse from honesty, then, by way of *dénoûment*, shame and death. It is simply morality in action.

L'Assommoir is assuredly the most chaste of my books. I have often had to probe far more disgusting sores. It is only the form that has frightened people. They have quarrelled with words. My crime is to have had the literary curiosity to pick up, and to cast in a highly elaborate mould, the language of the people. Ah! the form is the great crime! Yet there are dictionaries of this language, scholars study it, delighting in the freshness, the novelty, and the force of its figures of speech. It is a feast for the exploring instinct of grammarians. However, no one has realized that my intention was to engage in a purely philological undertaking, one which seems to me of extreme historical and social interest.

But I do not defend myself. My work will defend me. It is a work of truth, the first novel of the people which is not false, and which has the odour of the people. And it should not be inferred that the people as a whole is bad, for my characters are not bad, they are simply ignorant, and spoilt by the surroundings of poverty and hard labour in which they live. Only, it would be well to read my novels, to understand them, to see them clearly in their entirety, before bringing forward the ready-made opinions, ridiculous

and odious, which are circulated concerning myself and my works. Ah! if people only knew how my friends laugh at the appalling legend which amuses the crowd! If they only knew how the blood-thirsty wretch, the formidable novelist, is simply a respectable bourgeois, a man devoted to study and to art, living quietly in his corner, whose sole ambition is to leave as large and living a work as he can! I contradict no reports, I work on, and I rely on time, and on the good faith of the public, to discover me at last under the accumulation of nonsense that has been heaped upon me.

ÉMILE ZOLA.

L'ASSOMMOIR

CHAPTER I

Gervaise waited up for Lantier till two o'clock in the morning. Then, chilly from having stayed by the open window in her white bodice, she threw herself in a heap across the bed, feverish and half-crying. For a week past, as soon as they had come out of the "Veau à Deux Têtes," where they took their meals, he had packed her off to bed with the children; and he would come back late on in the night, saying that he had been looking for work. That evening, while she was watching for him, she thought she had seen him go into the ball of the Grand-Balcon, whose ten glaring windows lit up the black line of the outer boulevards like a sheet of flame; and behind him she had seen little Adèle, the metal-polisher who dined at their restaurant, walking five or six yards away, her hands swinging limply, as if she had just quitted his arm, so as not to go in together under the too-vivid light of the lamps at the door.

When Gervaise awoke, about five, stiff and

aching, she burst into sobs. Lantier had not come in. It was the first time that he had stayed out all night. She remained sitting on the edge of the bed, under the strip of faded chintz which hung from the bed-head fastened to the ceiling by a piece of string. And slowly, with her eyes bathed in tears, she looked all round the wretched little lodging-house room, with its walnut chest of drawers, in which one of the drawers was wanting, its three cane-bottom chairs, and its greasy little table, on which stood a dilapidated water jug. Besides that, they had had to put in an iron bedstead for the children, and the bedstead filled up two-thirds of the room, and blocked up the chest of drawers as well. Gervaise and Lantier's trunk, wide open in a corner, stretched out its empty sides, an old hat at the bottom stowed away under dirty shirts and socks; while, along the walls, on the backs of the chairs, hung a tattered shawl, a pair of trousers clotted with mud, old clothes too bad even for the old clothes' dealer. In the middle of the chimney-piece, between two ill-matching zinc candlesticks, there was a bundle of pawn-tickets, delicately pink-coloured. It was the best room of the hotel, the first floor room, looking on the street.

The two children were fast asleep, with their heads on the same pillow. Claude, who was eight years old, drew in long breaths, his little hands outside the quilt, while Étienne, who was only four, smiled in his sleep, one arm round the neck of his brother. As the mother's glance rested on the children, she burst out sobbing afresh, then pressed a handkerchief to her mouth, to stifle the little sobs

that she could not keep down. And bare-footed as she was, without thinking of putting on her slippers again, she went back to her post by the window, to her night watch, her scrutiny of the distant pavements.

The lodging-house was on the Boulevard de la Chapelle, to the left of the Barrière Poissonnière. It was a tumble-down two-storied building, painted dull red up to the second story, with shutters that the rains had soaked rotten. Underneath a lamp with cracked glass, between the two windows, "Hôtel Boncœur, tenu par Marsouiller," could just be made out in big yellow letters, from which bits of plaster had fallen away. Finding the lamp in her way, Gervaise stood upright, still holding the handkerchief to her lips. She looked to the right, in the direction of the Boulevard de Rochechouart, where groups of slaughterers stood about before the slaughter-houses, their aprons all over blood; and the fresh breeze brought up from time to time a grim stench of slaughtered beasts. She looked to the left, following the long trail of the avenue, which came to an end, almost opposite, at the white mass of the Hôpital de Lariboisière, then in course of construction. Slowly, from end to end of the horizon, she followed the *octroi* wall, behind which she had sometimes heard by night the cries of people being murdered; and she stared into the lonely angles, the dark corners, black with slime and filth, fearing lest she might come upon the body of Lantier—a knife through his belly. When she raised her eyes above this grey interminable wall, framing in the city with a strip of desert, she saw a broad glimmer, a dusty cloud of sunlight, out of which

rose the hum of Paris in the early dawn. But her eyes turned back instinctively to the Boulevard Poissonnière; she leaned out, dizzy with the unending flood that passed between the two squat sheds of the *octroi*—men, beasts, and carts, coming down from the heights of Montmartre and La Chapelle. There was a trampling, as of a herd in motion, a concourse of people, now and then scattered over the roadway by a sudden block, an endless file of workmen going to their work, their tools on their back, their bread under their arm; and the whole pack plunged and re-plunged, ceaselessly, into Paris. When Gervaise thought she recognized Lantier in the midst of the crowd, she leant further out of the window, at the risk of falling over; then she pressed her handkerchief tighter over her mouth, as if to keep down her sorrow.

A gay young voice behind her called her away from the window.

"Your good man not in, Madame Lantier?"

"No, Monsieur Coupeau," she replied, trying to smile.

It was a zinc-worker who had a ten-franc room at the top of the house. He had his bag across his shoulders. Finding the key in the door, he had walked right in, with friendly familiarity.

"You know," he went on, "I am working over yonder, at the hospital. What a fine May day! It is quite sharp this morning."

And he looked at Gervaise's face, red with crying. When he saw that the bed had not been slept in, he shook his head gravely; then he came up to where

the children lay sleeping like little rosy cherubs, and, lowering his voice,—

"So the good man is on the loose, eh? Don't you distress yourself about that, Madame Lantier. He is so taken up with politics; only the other day, when they were voting for Eugène Sue—a good sort, I believe—he went nearly off his head. Very likely he has been spending the night with his friends abusing that brute of a Bonaparte."

"No, no," she murmured, with an effort, "it is not what you think. I know where Lantier is. We have our troubles like everybody else."

Coupeau blinked his eyes, to shew that he was not taken in. And he went off, after offering to go and fetch the milk if she did not wish to go out: she was a real good woman, and she could count on him whenever she was in difficulties. As soon as he had gone, Gervaise returned to the window.

At the barrier, in the chill of the morning, that trampling, as of a herd in motion, still went on. The locksmiths were recognizable by their blue linen jackets, the masons by their white canvas trousers, the house-painters by their great coats, under which shewed long blouses. At that distance the crowd had a chalky appearance, a neutral tint, made up chiefly of faded blue and dingy grey. From time to time a workman would stand still to light his pipe, whilst all around him the others went on mechanically, without a laugh, without a word to one another, their cheeks pale and cadaverous, their eyes fixed on Paris, which swallowed them up, one by one, at the gaping mouth of the Rue du Faubourg-Poissonnière. But at

both corners of the Rue des Poissonniers, outside two wine-shops that were just taking down their shutters, some would slacken pace; and, before entering, would stand at the edge of the pavement, with a sidelong look at Paris, their arms hanging limply, already given over to a day's idleness. Before the bars, groups of men stood one another drinks, without noticing how the time went; crowding upon one another, spitting, coughing, clearing their throats with another little glass.

Gervaise had her eye fixed on Père Colombe's, on the left of the street, where she thought she had seen Lantier, when a fat woman in an apron, without a bonnet, called to her from the middle of the road,—

"I say, Madame Lantier, you're up early to-day!"

Gervaise leaned out.

"Ah! it's you, Madame Boche. Oh, I have a heap of things to get through to-day."

"That's it, that's it, one thing never comes alone."

And a conversation began, from window to pavement. Madame Boche was the *concierge* of the house in which the restaurant of the "Veau à Deux Têtes" occupied the ground floor. Gervaise had several times waited for Lantier in her lodge, so as not to have to sit down by herself at table, among all the men who took their meals there. The *concierge* mentioned that she was going just across the road, to the Rue de la Charbonnière, in order to find one of the workpeople, who was sure not to be up yet, from whom her husband could not get back a frock-

coat he had sent him to mend. Then she told how one of her lodgers had come in with a woman, the night before, and had kept everybody awake till three o'clock in the morning. But all the while, as she tattled away, she peered at the young woman with an air of extreme curiosity; and she seemed to have planted herself under the window with the sole purpose of finding out about things.

"Is Monsieur Lantier still in bed?" she enquired abruptly.

"Yes, he is asleep," replied Gervaise, unable to keep herself from blushing.

Madame Boche saw the tears that started to her eyes, and, no doubt satisfied in her own mind, she was going off saying how damned lazy men were, when she turned back to shout,—

"It is to-day, isn't it, that you go to the wash-house? I have some things to get washed; I'll keep you a place by me, and we'll have a chat."

Then, as if seized with a sudden pity,—

"You poor dear, you'd better not stay there any longer, you'll make yourself ill! Why, you are quite blue with the cold!"

Gervaise remained obstinately at the window for two mortal hours longer, till it was eight o'clock. The shops had opened. The flood of blouses coming down the hill had ceased; and only a few laggards hurried past the barrier with great strides. In the wine-shops the same men, still standing, went on drinking, coughing, and spitting. The workmen had been succeeded by the work-girls, the metal-polishers, the milliners, the florists, trotting along the outer boulevards in their

slim, tight-fitting clothes; going in companies of three or four, chatting gaily, with little laughs and bright glances to right and left; at long intervals, one, all by herself, thin, pale, and serious, would keep along by the wall of the *octroi*, avoiding the currents of filth. Then the *employés* went by, blowing on their fingers, eating their pennyworth of bread as they came along; young thin fellows, in coats too short for them, their eyes still heavy with sleep; little old men, who went swaying on their feet, with sallow faces, exhausted by the long office hours, looking at their watch in order to time themselves to a few seconds. The boulevards wore their peaceful morning aspect; the people of the neighbourhood were out sunning themselves; the mothers, bare-headed, and in dirty skirts, dandled their babies in swaddling clothes, which they changed on the benches; a whole swarm of brats, with dirty noses, and unbuttoned clothes, hustled and dragged each other about on the ground, with squealing, crying, and laughter. Then Gervaise felt her head and heart grow dizzy, as if all hope were at an end; it seemed to her that all was over and done, that Lantier would never come back any more. Her eyes wandered idly from the old slaughter-houses, black with blood and stench, to the new, glaring hospital, shewing, through the gaping holes of its rows of windows, the dark cells where death would come to mow down men. Over against her, behind the wall of the *octroi*, the dazzling sky, the sunrise broadening above the immense awakening of Paris, blinded her with its light.

She was sitting quietly on a chair, her hands in

her lap, the tears at an end now, when Lantier entered composedly.

"It's you! it's you!" she cried, and would have thrown her arms round his neck.

"Yes, it's me; what of that?" he answered. "None of that nonsense, if you please."

He pushed her aside; then, with an ill-tempered jerk, he flung his soft felt hat upon the chest of drawers. He was a young man of twenty-six, short, dark, and good-looking, with a thin moustache that he was always twisting with a mechanical movement of the hand. He had on a workman's canvas trousers, an old spotted frock-coat drawn in at the waist, and he spoke with a very pronounced Provençal accent.

Gervaise, relapsing on her chair, broke into gentle complaints, in broken phrases.

"I couldn't sleep a wink. I thought something must have happened. Where were you? Where did you spend the night? Oh, for God's sake, don't begin over again, or I shall go mad! Tell me, Auguste, where were you?"

"Where I had reason to be, naturally," said he, with a shrug of the shoulders. "At eight o'clock I was at La Glacière, where I went to see that friend of mine who is going to set up a hat factory. I stayed on late. Then I thought I had better stay the night. Besides, what business have you to pry into my affairs? Just shut up!"

The young woman began to sob again. The sound of voices, the hasty movements of Lantier, upsetting the chairs, had awakened the children.

They sat up, half naked, pushing back their hair with their little hands; and hearing their mother crying, they set up a terrible howl, crying too with their only half-opened eyes.

"That's a pretty sound!" cried Lantier, in a rage. "I give you warning, I'll take my hook pretty quick, and for good and all, this time. You will *not* be quiet? Good bye, then, I am going back where I came from."

And he took up his hat from the chest of drawers. But Gervaise sprang forward, stammering out,—

"No, no!"

And she stifled the little ones' tears with caresses, kissing their hair, and putting them back to bed with tender words. Pacified in a minute, they began to laugh, and amused themselves by pinching one another. Meanwhile the father, without even taking off his boots, had thrown himself on the bed with an air of exhaustion, his face haggard after a sleepless night. He did not go to sleep, but lay with his eyes wide open, looking all round the room.

"I do call this nice," he muttered.

Then, looking at Gervaise for an instant, he added, maliciously,—

"You've given up washing your face, then?"

Gervaise was only twenty-two. She was tall, slight, with thin features, already somewhat sharpened by the hardships of her life. With her hair uncombed, her slippered feet, shivering in her white bodice, on which the furniture had left some of its dust and grease, she seemed ten years older for the hours of anguish and tears that she had just passed through.

Lantier's words drew her out of her frightened and resigned attitude.

"You are not fair," she said, emphatically. "You know very well that I do all I can. It is not my fault if we have come down to this. I should like to see you, with the two children, in a room where there is not even a stove to get hot water. It would have been much better when you came to Paris, instead of wasting your money, if you had set us up at once, as you promised."

"Look here!" he cried, "you helped to use up the tin along with me; you needn't go back on it all now."

Not seeming to hear him, she went on,—

"Yes, if we stick at it, we may yet be able to pull through. Yesterday evening I saw Madame Fauconnier, the laundress of the Rue Neuve; she will take me on Monday. If you hit it off with your friend at La Glacière, the tide will turn in less than six months; we can get together some things, and find a corner somewhere where we shall have a home of our own. Oh, but we must work and work!"

Lantier turned over in bed, with an air of boredom. At that Gervaise burst out,—

"Yes, that's it; you'll never die of hard work, any way. You're puffed up with ambition, you want to dress like a gentleman, and go about with your whores in silks. So you don't think I look well enough, now you've made me put all my dresses in pawn? Look here, Auguste, I didn't mean to say anything to you about it, not yet, but I know very well where you spent the night; I saw you go into the Grand-

Balcon with that baggage Adèle. Oh, you find them, you do! A nice one, that! She may well give herself lady-like airs. She has gone to bed with all the restaurant!"

With a bound Lantier sprang up from the bed. His eyes shone black as ink out of the sallowness of his face. Rage, in this little man, woke a very tempest.

"Yes, with all the restaurant," the young woman repeated. "Madame Boche is going to give her the sack, her and her great lout of a sister, because there is always a whole relay of men on the staircase."

Lantier lifted his clenched fists; then, resisting his inclination to strike her, he seized her by the arms, shook her violently, and threw her back upon the children's bed. The children began to cry once more. Lantier lay down again, muttering sullenly, with the air of a man who is taking a resolution which he has long hesitated to take.

"You don't know what you're doing, Gervaise. You'll find out that you have made a mistake."

The children sobbed, and the mother, doubled up on the edge of the bed, held them both in her arms, saying over and over again, monotonously,—

"Ah, if it were not for you, my little ones! If it were not for you! If it were not for you!"

Quietly stretched out at his length, his eyes fixed on the strip of faded chintz above him, Lantier paid no heed, absorbed in one idea. He lay there for almost an hour, without giving way to the fatigue that weighed down his eyelids. When he turned round on one elbow, his face set and determined,

Gervaise had finished tidying the room. She had washed and dressed the children, and was now making their bed. He watched her sweeping up, dusting the furniture; the room still remained dark and dismal, with its smoky ceiling, its wall-paper half-unstuck with the damp, its three rickety chairs and chest of drawers, on which the dirt stuck hard, and went out in long streaks under the duster. Then, when she pinned up her hair, and began to wash herself before the little round looking-glass hanging from the hook of the window, which served him for shaving-glass, he seemed to be taking note of her bare arms and neck, all that he could see of her, as if he were making a mental comparison. And he had a dissatisfied movement of the lips. Gervaise limped with the right leg, but it was only noticeable when she was very tired, and let herself go. That morning, worn out by the fatigues of the night, she dragged her leg, supporting herself against the wall.

There was silence; not a word more had been spoken. He, on his part, seemed to be waiting. She, on hers, bustled about, trying to keep an indifferent countenance. As she made up into a bundle the dirty clothes thrown in the corner behind the trunk, he opened his lips at last, to ask her,—

"What are you doing? Where are you going?"

At first she made no answer. Then, when he had repeated his question angrily, she replied,—

"Can't you see? I am going to the wash. I can't have the children living in a pig-stye."

She picked up two or three handkerchiefs. Then, after another silence, he went on,—

"Have you any money?"

She stood upright, and looked him in the face, still holding the children's dirty shirts in her hand.

"Money? Where do you suppose I have stolen it, then? You know quite well that I raised three francs yesterday on my black skirt. We had dinner on that twice, and the money goes quickly when one has to pay for meat. No, I certainly haven't any money. I have four sous for the wash-house. I don't make money like some women do."

He took no notice of the allusion, but got up and looked carefully over the few odds and ends of clothing about the room. He took up the pair of trousers and the shawl, opened the chest of drawers, and took out a night-dress and two chemises; then he tossed the bundle into Gervaise's arms.

"Here, take that; go and pop it."

"Perhaps you would like me to take the children, too? Very handy that would be, if you could raise cash on the children!"

Nevertheless, she took the things to the pawn. She came back after half an hour, and put a five-franc coin on the chimney-piece, adding the pawn-ticket to the others between the two candlesticks.

"That's all they would give," she said. "I wanted six francs, but it couldn't be got. They don't mean to ruin themselves. And there are always plenty of people waiting."

Lantier did not take the five-franc piece at once. He would have liked her to have brought some smaller change, so that he might leave her something. But he put the coin in his pocket as soon as he saw

on the chest of drawers a bit of ham in a piece of paper, a scrap of bread with it.

"I didn't go for the milk," Gervaise explained, "because we owe them a week's money. But I shall be back early, and you can fetch some bread and chops while I am out. Get a bottle of wine, too."

He made no objection, and peace seemed to have been restored. The young woman went on picking up the dirty clothes; but when she was about to take Lantier's shirts and socks from the bottom of the trunk, he called to her to leave them.

"Leave them alone, do you hear? I won't have it."

"Won't have what?" she said, looking up. "You surely don't intend to put on those beastly things again? You must have them washed."

And she looked at him uneasily, finding the same hard expression on the fellow's handsome face, the expression of one whose mind is fully made up. He grew angry, tore the things from her hands, and flung them back into the trunk.

"Blast you! will you do what I tell you for once —when I tell you that I won't have it?"

"But why?" she said, growing pale, as a sudden suspicion flashed across her mind. "You don't want your shirts now, you are not going away anywhere. What difference does it make to you if I take them?"

He hesitated for a moment, put out by the fixity of her gaze.

"Why—why?" he stammered. "Confound it! you go about saying that you keep me, that you

do washing and mending. Well, I won't stand it—there! You attend to your business, and I'll attend to mine. Washerwomen don't work for dogs."

She entreated him, declaring that she had never made a single complaint; but he closed the trunk brutally, sat down upon it, and shouted in her face, "No!" He was master of his own belongings! Then, to avoid the looks with which she followed him, he went back and lay down once more on the bed, saying that he was sleepy, and she need not make any more row. And this time he seemed to go to sleep.

Gervaise stood for a moment undecided. She was half inclined to kick the bundle of clothes into a corner, and sit down and do some sewing. Lantier's regular breathing at last reassured her. She took the cake of blue and the bit of soap left over from her last washing; and going over to the children, who were quietly playing with old corks in front of the window, she kissed them, and whispered,—

"Be good now, and don't make a noise. Papa is asleep."

When she left the room, nothing was to be heard in the still silence but the subdued laughter of Claude and Étienne. It was ten o'clock. A ray of sunlight entered through the half-open window.

On the boulevard Gervaise turned to the left, and followed the Rue Neuve de la Goutte-d'Or. As she passed before Madame Fauconnier's shop, she greeted her with a little nod. The wash-house was situated half-way up the street, at the point where the road began to ascend. Above a flat block of building,

three enormous reservoirs, cylinders of zinc strongly clamped with iron, displayed their grey bulk; while behind them rose the drying-room, a very lofty second story, closed on all sides by shutters with thin laths, through which the air passed freely, and through which one could see the linen hung up to dry on brass wires. To the right of the reservoirs the straight funnel of the steam-boiler puffed out jets of white smoke with a strong and regular respiration. Gervaise, without picking up her skirts, like one accustomed to puddles, made her way through the door blocked with jars of salts of lemon. She knew the overseer of the place, a little delicate woman with sore eyes, who sat in a compartment framed in with glass, the registers before her, blocks of soap on shelves, cakes of blue in bowls, and pound-packets of bicarbonate of soda; and in passing she asked for her dolly, for pounding the clothes, and her brush, which she had left there in charge at her last washing. Then, having taken her number, she went in.

It was an immense flat-roofed shed, the beams all shewing, with cast iron pillars, and large windows. A wan light from without mingled freely with the hot steam that hung like a milky-coloured fog. Smoke rose in certain corners, and spread in a bluish mist, obscuring the far distance. There was a heavy dampness in the air, smelling of soap, a dull, moist, unchanging smell; and from time to time the stronger odour of salts of lemon made itself felt. On each side of the passage which ran down the centre there were files of women, their arms bare to the shoulder, their necks bare, their petticoats hitched up, shewing

coloured stockings and thick laced boots. They pounded away furiously, laughed, leaned back to shout out a word in the general hubbub, bent over their tubs; foul-mouthed, brutal, voluble, dripping with water, their flesh red and steaming. Round them and under them water flowed abundantly, buckets of hot water carried and emptied at one splash, taps of cold water running, soap-suds flying, wrung-up clothes dripping, the pools in which they paddled running off in little rivulets along the sloping tiles. And amidst all the cries, the rhythmical strokes, the murmur of rain, the mutterings of storm choked back under the steaming roof, the steam-boiler on the right, pearled white with dew, panted and snorted unceasingly, with its dancing fly-wheel that seemed to regulate the enormous uproar.

Meanwhile Gervaise made her way slowly down the passage, looking to right and left. She carried her bundle of clothes on her arm, her hip a little raised, limping more than ever, in the midst of all this going and coming of women hustling her.

"Hi! this way, my dear!" cried the loud voice of Madame Boche.

When the young woman had made her way up, right at the end on the left-hand side, the *concierge* began to talk in short jerks, while she went on with her work of rubbing a sock with great vehemence.

"Here's your place, I have kept it for you. Oh, mine won't take me long. Boche scarcely dirties his things at all. You won't be long either, will you? It's quite a little bundle. We can get done by twelve, and then we can go and have *déjeuner*. I used to give

my things to a laundress in the Rue Poulet; but she wore them all to shreds with her washing-powder and her brushes. So now I do it myself. You gain every way. There's only the price of the soap. I say, you ought to have put those shirts to soak. Those little brats—my word! they have backsides like soot."

Gervaise undid her bundle, and spread out the little shirts; and when Madame Boche advised her to get a bucket of lye-wash, she answered,—

"Oh, no! hot water will do. I'm quite accustomed to the work."

She picked out the linen, and put the coloured things on one side. Then, having filled her tub with four bucketsful of cold water from the tap behind her, she plunged into it the heap of white linen; and, raising her skirt and holding it between her legs, she got into a box, standing on end, which reached to her waist.

"You're quite accustomed to it, you say?" repeated Madame Boche. "You used to be a laundress, didn't you, my dear?"

Gervaise turned up her sleeves, shewing her young arms, the arms of a blonde, a little rosy at the elbows, and began to get out the dirt from her linen. She spread out a shirt on the flat washing-board before her, worn and whitened by the action of the water; she soaped it, turned it, rubbed it on the other side. Before answering, she seized the dolly, and began to pound away, shouting her words, and punctuating them with heavy, regular strokes.

"Yes—yes—laundress—when I was ten—twelve years ago. We used to go down to the river. Better

air than here. You ought to see it; there was a nice corner under the trees—clear running water. You know—at Plassans. Don't you know Plassans, near Marseilles?"

"Well, you are game!" cried Madame Boche, astonished at the vigour of the strokes. "Strong as a horse she is, with her little lady-like arms!"

The conversation went on, in loud tones. Sometimes the *concierge*, obliged to stoop over, did not catch what was said. All the linen was beaten out, and Gervaise replunged it into the tub, taking it out piece by piece, to rub it over with soap for the second time, and scrub it. She held it with one hand on the washing-board; with the other, in which she had the scrubbing-brush, she drew from the linen a dirty froth which fell slobbering to the ground. Then, as the brushes did not make much noise, they drew closer together, and talked over more private affairs.

"No, we are not married," Gervaise went on. "I don't hide the fact. I shouldn't altogether relish the idea of being Lantier's wife. If it were not for the children . . . I was fourteen and he eighteen when we had our first. The other came four years later. It was the usual story, you know. I wasn't happy at home; old Macquart would give me a kick for a yes or a no. So you see one has to amuse one's self elsewhere. We might have got married, but I don't know—our parents didn't care about it."

She shook her hands, all red, under the soap-suds.

"The water is awfully hard at Paris," she said.

Madame Boche went on with her washing very slowly. She kept soaping the things, so as to be able

to stay on and find out the whole story, which she had been longing to learn for the last fortnight. Her mouth, in her great fat face, stood half open; her bulging eyes shone with curiosity. She thought, and she was proud of having guessed it,—

"The child is too talkative. There has been a squabble."

Then she said aloud,—

"He isn't nice to you, then?"

"Don't talk to me about it," replied Gervaise; "he used to be as nice as possible in the country, but since we came to Paris I can't make him out. I must tell you that his mother died last year, leaving him something, about seventeen hundred francs. Then he would go to Paris. And as old Macquart still gave me nothing but blows, without rhyme or reason, I agreed to come with him; and we came up with the two children. He was going to set me up as a laundress, and work at his own business as a hatter. We should have been very comfortable. But, you see, Lantier is so uppish, and he's such a spendthrift; never thinks of anything but his own amusement; that's all he's good for! We put up first at the Hôtel Montmartre, Rue Montmartre. And that meant dinners, and cabs, and theatres, a gold watch for him, a silk dress for me; for he's not a bad sort when he has money. You understand, a regular flare-up, and then at the end of two months we were simply cleaned out. Then we had to come and put up at the Hôtel Boncœur, and then all this cursed existence began."

She stopped, with a choking sensation at her

throat, scarcely able to keep back the tears. She had finished scrubbing the clothes.

"I must go and get some hot water," she murmured.

But Madame Boche, very much put out by this break in her confidences, called to the work-boy who was passing,—

"Charles, be a good fellow and fetch some hot water for this lady; she is in a hurry."

The boy took the bucket, and brought it back full. Gervaise paid; it was a sou the bucket. She poured the hot water into the tub, and gave the clothes a last soaping between her hands, bending over the washing-board in the midst of the steam that left threads of grey smoke in her blonde hair.

"Here, have some soda; I have some left," said the *concierge*, obligingly.

And she emptied into Gervaise's tub what remained at the bottom of a little bag of carbonate of soda, which she had brought with her. She offered her some salts of lemon, but the young woman declined it; it was only good for grease and wine-stains.

"I fancied he was a little inclined to be gay," Madame Boche went on, returning to the subject of Lantier, without naming him.

Gervaise, doubled right over, her hands buried and entangled in the clothes, merely shook her head.

"Yes, yes," continued the other, "I noticed several little things . . ."

But she added hastily, as Gervaise raised herself suddenly up, quite pale, and looking straight at her:

"Oh! no, I don't really know anything. He only means it in fun, I know, that is all. The two girls who lodge with us, for instance—Adèle and Virginie, you know them? Well, he fools about with them a bit; but no more than that, I'm sure."

The young woman, rigid before her, her face bathed in sweat, her arms dripping, looked her straight in the face with a fixed and steady stare. Then the *concierge* fired up, and struck her chest with her clenched fist, giving her word of honour. She cried,—

"I know nothing—there—I assure you!"

Then calming herself, she added sweetly, speaking as one does to a person from whom it is better to hide the truth,—

"For my part, I think he looks quite straightforward. He'll marry you, my dear, I am certain."

Gervaise wiped her forehead with her wet hand. Then she drew another piece of clothes out of the water, shaking her head once more. Both were silent for a few moments. All around them the wash-house had grown quiet. Eleven o'clock struck. The greater part of the washers, crouching on one leg at the edge of their tubs, a small bottle of wine uncorked at their feet, were eating sausages sandwiched into pieces of bread. But those who had to get back to their families hurried on with their work, glancing at the clock suspended above the bureau.

The sound of a dolly was heard now and again, at long intervals, amid the subdued laughs, the conversations impeded by the greedy snapping of jaws; whilst the steam boiler, going on without rest or respite,

seemed to raise its voice, vibrating, snorting, filling the huge building. But not a single woman noticed it; it was like the very breath of the place itself, an ardent breath drawing up into itself, under the beams of the roof, the eternal cloud of steam. The heat became intolerable; rays of sunlight entered on the left through the high windows, illuminating the steaming mists with coloured streaks, delicately rose-grey and grey-blue. There were loud complaints, and the boy Charles went from window to window, pulling down the coarse canvas blinds; then he crossed to the other side, the shady side, and opened the top of the casements. There was a general applause, a clapping of hands; a gross hilarity reigned. Soon the last strokes of the dolly died away. The washers, with their mouths full, made only a motion now and again with the clasp-knives that they held open in their hands. The silence became so profound that the scraping of the stoker's shovel, as it shovelled the coal into the furnace, could be heard distinctly at the other end of the building.

Meanwhile Gervaise went on washing the coloured things in the hot water, thick with soap, which she had not thrown away. When she had finished, she went over to a trestle, and threw the things one after another across it, leaving little bluish pools on the ground. And she began to wring them out. Behind her the cold-water tap ran into a huge tub fastened to the ground, and crossed by two wooden bars on which to place the linen. Above, in the air, there were two other bars on which the linen was put to finish dripping.

"There now, that's nearly finished, and a good job too," said Madame Boche. "I'll stop and help you to wring out your things."

"Oh, you needn't, thanks very much," replied the young woman, kneading the coloured things in her hands, and dipping them into the fresh water. "If I had sheets to do, I wouldn't say no."

But after all she had to accept the *concierge's* aid. They were both wringing out a petticoat, one at each end, a drab woollen stuff, badly dyed, out of which ran a yellowish stream, when Madame Boche cried out,—

"Hallo, there's big Virginie! What is she coming here to wash for, I wonder, with her two or three rags in a handkerchief?"

Gervaise raised her head sharply. Virginie was a girl of her own age, taller than herself, dark, pretty, despite her rather long face. She had on an old black dress with flounces, a red ribbon at her neck; and her hair was carefully done, the chignon confined in a net of blue chenille. For a moment, as she came down the central aisle, she blinked her eyelids, as if she were looking for someone; then, seeing Gervaise, she came close past her, stiff and insolent, swaying her body as she walked, and installed herself in the same row, five tubs away.

"There's a notion!" Madame Boche went on, lowering her voice. "She never soaped a pair of cuffs in her life. A lazy lie-a-bed, I can tell you! A sempstress who can't so much as sew on a button to her boots! She's like her sister, that little scrub of an Adèle, who stays away from the work-room two days

out of three. Hasn't father or mother that I know of, lives nobody knows how, and if one liked to tell tales . . . . What is she rubbing? Oh, a petticoat! Beastly enough it is; it must have seen something, that petticoat!"

Madame Boche evidently wanted to make herself agreeable to Gervaise. The truth was, that she often had a glass with Adèle and Virginie when they had any money. Gervaise made no reply, but went on hurriedly, with feverish hands. She had just been making her blue in a little three-legged tub. She dipped in her linen, stirred it for a minute in the coloured water, which in its reflection had a touch of lake, then, wringing the things tightly, she laid them out on the wooden bars above. While doing this she made a pretence of turning her back on Virginie. But she heard her chuckling, she felt her eyes upon her. Virginie seemed to have come there for the special purpose of annoying her. Presently Gervaise turned; their eyes met, and they looked at each other fixedly.

"Come, come now," murmured Madame Boche. "Don't fly at one another's throats. I assure you it's nothing—nothing. It isn't her!"

At that moment, as Gervaise hung up her last article, there was a roar of laughter at the door of the wash-house.

"Two kids who want mamma," cried Charles.

The women all looked. Gervaise recognized Claude and Étienne. As soon as they saw her they ran towards her through the puddles, the heels of their unlaced shoes clattering on the tiles. Claude,

the elder, held his little brother by the hand. The washers, as they passed along, uttered little affectionate cries, seeing the children frightened, yet smiling. And they stood there before their mother, holding one another tight, and lifting their little blonde heads.

"Did papa send you?" asked Gervaise.

But as she stooped to lace up Étienne's shoes she saw on Claude's finger the key of the room, with its metal number.

"What! you have got the key?" she cried, greatly surprised. "Why have you brought it?"

The child, noticing the key, which he had forgotten on his finger, seemed to recollect, and cried in his clear voice,—

"Papa is gone away."

"He has gone to get the *déjeuner*, you mean; he sent you for me, did he?"

Claude looked at his brother, not knowing what to say. Then he said straight off,—

"Papa is gone away. He got out of bed, he put his things in the trunk, he put the trunk in a cab. He is gone away."

Gervaise rose slowly up, her face quite white; she put her hands to her cheeks and her temples, as if her head were splitting. And she could only say over and over again, in a monotonous voice,—

"Oh, God! oh, God! oh, God!"

Meanwhile Madame Boche questioned the child in her turn, quite excited at finding herself mixed up with the affair.

"Look here, my child, you must tell us all

about it. He locked the door himself, didn't he, and told you to bring the key?"

Then, lowering her voice, she said in Claude's ear,—

"Was there a lady in the cab?"

The child looked puzzled; then began his story over again triumphantly,—

"He got out of bed, he put his things in the trunk, he is gone away."

Then, as soon as Madame Boche left off questioning him, he pulled his brother over to the tap, and they both amused themselves by setting the water running.

Gervaise could not weep. She stood choking, leaning up against the tub, her face between her hands. Little shivers ran through her, and now and again she heaved a long sigh, whilst she squeezed her fists harder against her eyes, as if seeking oblivion in the depths of her desolation. She seemed to be falling down, down into a great pit of darkness.

"Well my dear, this *is* a go!" murmured Madame Boche.

"If you only knew—if you only knew!" she said at last in a low voice. "He sent me out this very morning to take my shawl and my chemises to pawn, so that he could pay for that cab."

And she burst out crying. The recollection of that visit to the pawn-shop, bringing out one definite detail of what she had gone through that morning, had set flowing the tears that stuck in her throat. And it seemed to her an abomination, the special drop of gall in her cup of bitterness. The tears

ran down her chin, already wet with her hands, and she never even thought of using her handkerchief.

"Hush! hush! be sensible now," said Madame Boche, bustling about her. "To think of making all that fuss for a man! You're still in love with him then, my poor dear? Why, just now you were quite mad with him, and now you're crying your eyes out for the man! Lord! what fools we women are!"

Then she grew quite maternal.

"Such a nice, pretty woman too, if one may say so. You don't mind my telling you everything now, do you? Well, you remember when I saw you at the window, I had my suspicions. What do you think? That very night when Adèle came in I heard a man's footstep with her. So as I was curious I looked up the staircase. The party had got to the second story, but I could recognize Monsieur Lantier's coat. Boche, who was on the look-out this morning, saw him come downstairs quite composedly. He was with Adèle, you understand. Virginie has a gentleman whom she goes home with twice a week. Still, it is not quite decent, all the same, for they have only one room and a recess, and I don't quite see where Virginie could sleep."

She paused for an instant, looked around, and resumed in her big, husky voice,—

"She is laughing at you because you are crying, heartless thing! I'd wager her coming here to wash is only a lay. She has packed off the two of them,

and come here to tell them how you take the news."

Gervaise lifted her face from her hands, and looked. When she saw Virginie in the midst of two or three women, whispering and staring over at her, she was seized with a sort of mad rage. She made a few steps forward, fumblingly, her arms outstretched, all her limbs a-tremble; and finding a full bucket in her way, she seized it with both hands, and emptied it at one splash.

"Get away, you bitch!" cried Virginie, jumping back, so that the water only just wetted her shoes. All the women, consternated at the sight of Gervaise's tears, crowded round to see the fight. Some of them, who were just finishing their meal, mounted on tubs; others ran up, their hands covered with soap-suds. A circle formed.

"Ah, the bitch!" repeated the tall girl. "What's up with her, crack-brain?"

Gervaise, her mouth set, her face working convulsively, made no reply; she had not got into the Paris way of slanging. The other went on,—

"Look at her! she served her time in the country, *she* did. She was a soldier's mattress before she was twelve—left a leg behind her at home. It was rotten —that's why."

There was a general laugh. Virginie, seeing her advantage, made two steps forward, drawing herself up to her full height, and cried louder still,—

"Come on then, let's see you and have it out! We don't want you plaguing us here. Don't I know her, the drab! If she had only touched me, I'd have given her a good walloping—you see! What have I

done to her? What's the matter, draggle-tail?"

"Don't talk so much," stuttered Gervaise. "You know very well. Where was my husband last night? Be quiet, or I swear I'll strangle you."

"Her husband! oh, that's good! The lady's husband! As if people who waddled like that have husbands! It isn't my fault if he has thrown you over. I haven't stolen him, at any rate. Would you like to search me? Do you want to know the truth? You were simply killing the man. He was much too good for you. But had he got his collar on? Has anyone found the lady's husband? A reward will be given."

There was another laugh. Gervaise simply answered, almost in a whisper:

"You know—all right; you know—all right. It is your sister. I'll strangle her—I will."

"Well, go and lick my sister, then," said Virginie, sniggering. "My sister, if you like! Oh, very likely! my sister cuts a very different figure from you. But what's that to me? Can't I do my washing in peace? Just shut up, do you see; I've had enough of it."

But after having pounded away five or six times with her dolly, she returned to the charge, intoxicated with her own abuse. Thrice she finished up, and thrice she began again.

"Well—yes, it was my sister. Will that satisfy you? They're awfully in love with one another. You should see them kissing and cuddling! And so he has thrown you and your bastards over? Nice kids they are, with their snotty faces! You had one

off a policeman, didn't you? and you starved three more, so as not to have too much luggage to bring with you. Your Lantier told us all that. Ah, he says nice things of you; he's had quite enough of your old carcase!"

"You slut! you slut! you slut!" shrieked Gervaise, beside herself, and shaking with fury.

She turned, looked down, and finding only the small tub full of blue, seized it by the legs, and flung the water in Virginie's face.

"The jade! she has spoilt my dress," cried Virginie. One shoulder was simply soaked, and her left hand all over blue. "Wait a minute, you dirty whore!"

And she too seized a bucket, and emptied it over her opponent. Then began a regular battle royal. Both ran to the tubs, seized on the full buckets, and dashed the water at one another, accompanying each deluge with a volley of abuse, in which even Gervaise joined.

"Take that, dirty beast! That got you! That'll cool your arse for you!"

"Ah! the drab! There's for your dirt. That'll wash your face for once in your life."

"Yes, yes, I'll salt you, you kipper!"

"There's another for you! That'll tidy you up for to-night, when you walk the Rue Belhomme!"

Finally they filled the buckets at the taps, and while they waited for them to fill, they still went on hurling abuse at one another. The first few buckets, badly aimed, hardly touched them. But they soon got more expert. Virginie was the first to get one

Chapter I

And she, too, seized a bucket, and emptied it over her opponent. Then began a regular battle royal. Both ran to the tubs, seized on the full buckets, and dashed the water at one another, accompanying each deluge with a volley of abuse, in which even Gervaise joined.

full in the face; the water went in at her neck, streamed down her back and chest, and ran out under her dress. She had not recovered from the shock when another caught her sideways, giving her a sharp slap on the left ear, and soaking her chignon, which unrolled like a cord. Gervaise was hit first in the legs; one bucketful filled her shoes, and squirted half way up her leg; two others deluged her thighs. And it was soon impossible to tell which strokes took effect. Both were streaming from head to foot, their bodices plastered down on their shoulders, their skirts glued to their waists; they seemed to have shrunk up and stiffened out, they were shivering with cold, and the drops ran out of them on all sides like umbrellas in the rain.

"Don't they look funny!" said a husky voice. All the women were immensely amused. Everyone had drawn back so as not to get splashed; and jokes and applause mingled with the sluicing of water, as the buckets were emptied at random. Great pools formed on the ground, in which the women splashed up to their ankles. Meanwhile Virginie, with a tricky movement, caught up a bucket of boiling water which had been brought for one of her neighbours, and emptied it over Gervaise. There was a cry; everyone thought Gervaise was scalded. But the boiling water had only slightly caught her left foot. Frantic with the pain, she hurled an empty bucket with all her force straight at Virginie. It caught her in the legs and she fell.

All the women cried out together,—

"She has broken her leg!"

"Good Lord!—well, but she wanted to roast her alive!"

"She's in the right, after all—if they sneaked away her man."

Madame Boche exclaimed aloud, lifting her hands to heaven. She had kept at a safe distance, between two tubs; and the two children, Claude and Étienne, choking with tears and fright, clung to her dress, with a little ceaseless wail of "Mamma! Mamma!" half lost in their sobs. When she saw Virginie on the ground, she rushed forward and caught Gervaise by the skirt, saying again and again,—

"Come now, that's enough. Do give over. My word! you make my blood run cold. I never saw such a shocking row in my life."

But she soon drew back, and sought refuge between the two tubs, with the children. Virginie sprang at the throat of Gervaise. She squeezed as hard as she could, trying to strangle her, but Gervaise with a violent effort shook herself free, and fastened upon the tail of her chignon, as if she would tear it bodily away. The fight was now in silence, without a word or cry. They did not wrestle with one another, but aimed straight for the face, their fingers crooked out, clutching and clawing at whatever they could seize. The tall girl's red ribbon and blue chenille hair-net were torn away; her bodice, splitting at the neck, shewed her bare flesh, right along one shoulder; while the other—one arm, in some unaccountable way, slipt out of the sleeve of her white bodice—had a rent in her chemise, which shewed a bit of her bare side. Tattered strips flew in all

directions. It was from Gervaise that blood was first drawn, three long scratches from her mouth along her chin; and she safeguarded her eyes by shutting them at every blow, for fear of being blinded. As yet she had drawn no blood from Virginie. She tried to get at her ears, furious at not being able to seize them; at last she clutched one of her earrings, a drop of yellow glass; she pulled it clean through the ear; blood flowed.

"They will kill each other! Separate them—the bitches!" cried several voices.

The women came closer, some of them urging on the combatants as if they were dogs fighting; others, more nervous, turned away their heads, trembling, saying they had had quite enough, it would certainly make them ill. It was near coming to a general fight; the two parties declared one another heartless, not up to anything; bare arms were outstretched; three slaps were heard.

Meanwhile Madame Boche looked about for the attendant.

"Charles! Charles! Where is he?"

She found him in the front row, his arms folded, staring with all his might. He was a great big bull-necked fellow. He laughed, chuckling over the bits of bare flesh that he could see in the two women. The little blonde was as plump as a quail. It would be a lark if her chemise were torn open.

"See!" he said with a wink, "she has a strawberry under her arm."

"What! you there!" cried Madame Boche, as she caught sight of him. "Why don't you help to

separate them? You could do it easily enough."

"No thanks, not for me," he answered composedly. "Get my eye scratched out as I did the other day? That's not what I come here for; I have plenty else to do. Don't you be frightened. A little blood-letting will do them good: that'll cool them down!"

The *concierge* talked of going for the police; but the overseer of the wash-house, the little delicate woman with sore eyes, would not hear of it. She repeated several times,—

"No, no, I won't have it; it will disgrace the place."

The two women still fought on the ground. Suddenly Virginie rose to her knees, brandishing in the air a dolly that she had picked up. In a choking voice she screamed,—

"I'll give it to you! Bring your dirty things here!"

Gervaise reached out sharply, and seized another dolly, which she held in the air like a club. And she too screamed hoarsely,—

"Ah! you want a good drubbing, do you? I'll make dish-clouts of you!"

For a moment they remained motionless, crouching menacingly opposite to one another. Their hair in their eyes, their chests heaving, covered with dirt and bruises, they waited their chance, and tried to regain breath. Gervaise struck the first blow, the dolly just touching Virginie's shoulder. She leant on one side to avoid the return blow, which caught her lightly on the hip. Then, warming up, they went at it as if they were beating linen, hard and regularly.

When a blow struck it sounded dully, as if it had fallen in a bucket of water.

By this time no one laughed; some of the women had moved away, saying the sight made them sick; those who remained leaned forward, their eyes alight with a cruel glitter, saying they *were* game—these two lasses. Madame Boche hurried Claude and Étienne away, and their sobs could be heard from the other end of the place between the ringing blows of the dollies.

All at once Gervaise uttered a howl. Virginie had caught her, full force, on her bare arm, just above the elbow; a red mark appeared, and the flesh swelled up at once. Then she flung herself on the other, as if she were going to demolish her.

"That's enough! that's enough!" was the cry.

Her face was so awful that no one dared to approach her. With superhuman strength she seized Virginie by the waist, doubled her over, and laid her face downwards on the floor; then, despite her struggles, she tore her skirts sheer off her. When she came to her drawers, she thrust her hand into the opening and gave it a great tear, laying bare her naked thighs and buttocks. Then she raised her dolly, and began to pound away, as she had once done at Plassans, on the banks of the Viorne, when her mistress was washing the garrison linen. The wood went thud, with a dull sound, into the white flesh, leaving a red streak at every blow.

"Oh! oh!" murmured Charles, opening his eyes in blank amazement.

A few laughs were heard again. But soon the

cry "Enough! enough!" began once more. Gervaise, untiring, heard nothing. She went steadily to work, leaning over, intent on not leaving a dry inch; set on beating all that flesh through and through, blasting it with confusion. And in her fierce jollity she shouted scraps of a washerwoman's song that came into her mind,—

"Bang! bang! Moll's at the wash,
Bang! bang! the dolly goes squash;
Bang! bang! get your heart clean,
Bang! bang! black as a bean."

Then she went on,—

"That's for you, and that's for your sister, and that's for Lantier. When you see them, give them that. Wait a bit; I'm beginning again. That's for Lantier, and that's for your sister, and that's for you.

"Bang! bang! Moll's at the wash,
Bang! bang! the dolly goes squash."

They tore Virginie bodily out of her hands. The big girl, weeping, shamefaced, and crimson, pulled together her things and took to her heels, utterly conquered. Meanwhile Gervaise slipped her arm back into her sleeve, and fastened up her skirts. Her arm pained her, and she begged Madame Boche to lift her bundle of clothes on her shoulder. The *concierge* told how the fight had gone, how she herself had felt, and wanted to examine her to see if she was all right.

"You must really have something broken. I heard such a blow."

But Gervaise insisted on going. She answered not a word to the condolements, the gushing ovation

of the washers who stood all around her in their long, straight aprons. When she had her bundle she made her way to the door, where the children were waiting for her.

"It is two hours, that makes two sous," said the overseer, already re-installed in her glassed compartment.

Why two sous? She could not understand that they were simply asking her for the entrance-money. But she put down her two sous. Then, limping badly under the weight of the damp things on her shoulder, herself dripping, her elbow black and blue, her face bleeding, she went her way, dragging at her bare arms Étienne and Claude, who trotted along beside her, their faces still smudged and working with their sobs.

When she had gone, the wash-house returned to its huge monotonous noise, as of a rushing weir. The washers had eaten their bread and drunk their wine, and they pounded away harder than ever, still excited and amused with Gervaise and Virginie's knock-down fight. All along the tubs, over again, there was a furious stir of arms; sharp profiles worked violently up and down like marionettes on hinges, their limbs doubled up, their shoulders awry. There was a general conversation from end to end of the two lines. The sound of voices, of laughter, of broad jokes, struck sharply through the continuous splash of the water. The taps ran over, the buckets spilled at every step, a rivulet made its way underneath the washing-boards. It was the last spurt of the afternoon, the dollies went pounding away on the linen. The steam took a reddish

tinge in the immense shed, flaked with rays of sunlight, golden motes that the rents in the blinds left a way for. The stifled warmth of soapy odours went up. All at once the shed was filled with a white mist; the huge cover of the boiler went slowly up a toothed rod in the middle, and the gaping aperture of the boiler, embedded in its brick masonry, puffed out clouds of steam, in which one distinguished the sweet savour of potash. Meanwhile, at the sides, the wringing machines worked away; bundles of linen between the cast-iron cylinders were wrung dry with a turn of the wheel, and the great machine, panting and smoking, shook the whole place with the ceaseless activity of its arms of steel.

When Gervaise put foot in the street of the Hôtel Boncœur, tears came into her eyes again. It was a dark and narrow side street, with a runlet along the wall to throw the slops in; and the smell, coming back on her again, recalled the fortnight she had spent there with Lantier, a fortnight of misery and squabbling, the remembrance of which at that moment brought a sting of regret. It all seemed to her of a piece with her own desolation.

Upstairs she found the room bare, the sunlight striking full in, the window open. And the sunlight, with its sheet of dancing gold, seemed to make the blackened ceiling, the tattered walls, more dismal than ever. There was nothing now on the nail over the chimney-piece but a little kerchief twisted into a knot. The children's bed had been pulled out into the middle of the room, away from the chest of drawers—the drawers all open and empty. Lantier had washed, and had

finished up the pomatum, a pennyworth in a playing card; the grease from his hands filled the basin. And he had forgotten nothing. The corner in which the trunks had always lain seemed to Gervaise like a great empty hole. She could not even find the little round looking-glass that hung on the hook of the window. Then, with a presentiment of what she would find, she looked over the chimney-piece. Lantier had carried off the pawn-tickets; the little packet, delicately pink-coloured, was no longer there, between the two ill-matching candlesticks.

She hung her linen over the back of a chair, and she stood there looking round her, looking at thing after thing, too overcome even to weep. A single sou remained out of the four sous she had put aside for the wash-house. Then, hearing Étienne and Claude laughing gaily by the window, she crossed over, and put her arms about them, losing sight of the present for a moment as she looked out on the grey road, where, that morning, she had seen the huge awakening of Paris to its toil. At that hour the street flung up a hot and burning shadow above the town behind the *octroi* wall. And she was thrown on the street, on that very pavement, with its stifling air, she and her little ones alone; and she looked slowly along the line of the outer boulevards, to right, to left, pausing at each end with a sort of dull terror, feeling as if all her life were to be lived out now, there, between a slaughter-house and a hospital.

CHAPTER II

THREE weeks later, about half-past eleven o'clock on a fine sunny day, Gervaise and Coupeau were having a glass together at Père Colombe's "Assommoir." Coupeau, who was smoking a cigarette outside, had seen her coming along the street on her way back from taking home some clothes, and he had insisted on her coming in. Her big square laundry basket lay on the ground beside her, behind the little zinc table.

Père Colombe's "Assommoir" was at the corner of the Rue des Poissonniers and the Boulevard de Rochechouart. On the sign was painted, from end to end, in long blue letters, the one word *Distillation*. At the door, in two half-casks, were planted some dusty oleanders. The great bar, with its rows of glasses, its draw-out and its pewter measures, was at the left on entering; and the big room was decorated all round by great casks painted bright yellow, varnished, and glittering with shining hoops and brass taps. Above, on shelves, liqueur and syrup bottles, all sorts of phials ranged in order, covered the walls, and in the glass behind the counter one saw reflections of

bright colours, of apple greens, of pale lake. But the curiosity of the place was further back, on the other side of an oak barrier, in a covered court, the distilling apparatus, which the customers could see working; long-necked alembics, "worms" that sank into the earth, a very witches' brew, at which boozy workmen were never tired of staring.

At the hour of *déjeuner*, the "Assommoir" was quite empty. Père Colombe, a big man of forty, in his shirt-sleeves, was serving a little girl of twelve, who had asked for four sous of spirits in a cup. A broad ray of sunlight entered at the door, warming the floor under foot, always humid with the spittle of smokers. And, from counter, from cask, from the whole interior, there rose a liquorish odour, a reek of alcohol, in which the dancing motes of the sunlight seemed to turn heavy and grey.

Meanwhile, Coupeau rolled a fresh cigarette. He looked quite neat, with his working jacket and his little blue canvas cap; he laughed, shewing his white teeth. His under lip protruded, he had rather a snub nose, but his eyes were dark and handsome, and he had a jolly good-humoured expression. His thick curly hair was brushed right up; his skin, despite his twenty-six years, had not yet hardened. Over against him, Gervaise, in her black orléans, and bareheaded, finished eating her prune, which she held by the stem with the tips of her fingers. They were close to the street, at the first of the four tables ranged along the casks before the counter.

When the zinc-worker had lit his cigarette, he put his elbows on the table, and, leaning forward,

looked for a minute, without speaking, at his neighbour, whose pretty blonde face had, just then, the milky transparency of fine porcelain. Then, referring to a matter of which only they two knew, already much debated, he said quietly, in a low voice:

"Then it is no? You say no?"

"Oh, yes, indeed, Monsieur Coupeau!" replied Gervaise, composedly, with a smile. "You are surely not going to bring up that subject here. You said you would behave yourself. If I had known, I shouldn't have accepted your drink."

He said nothing, merely looked at her, quite close, with a tender assurance, transported by the corners of her lips, a pale rose, just moistened, and shewing the vivid red of her mouth when she smiled. She did not draw back, but sat there quiet and affectionate. After a silence she said,—

"You don't really mean it, after all. I am quite old; I have a boy of eight. What should we do together?"

"The deuce!" murmured Coupeau, with a wink, "what everybody else does!"

She made a tired movement.

"Ah! if you imagine it is all a joke, it is very evident that you have never had to look after a household. No, Monsieur Coupeau, I have to look at things seriously. Fooling about is all very well, but it doesn't mean much after all. How do you suppose I am to bring up my little ones at that rate? Besides, you see, my ill luck has been a fine lesson for me. I don't go in for men again. I'm not easily caught now."

She made the explanation without any air of annoyance, quite sensibly, quite coldly, as if she had been discussing a business matter—the reasons why a habit-shirt should not be starched. She had evidently made up her mind, after long reflection.

Coupeau repeated tenderly:

"You distress me very much! You distress me very much!"

"Yes, I see it," she replied, "and I am sorry for you, Monsieur Coupeau. You mustn't take it amiss. If I had any inclination that way, it would be with you rather than with anyone else. You seem a good sort, you are always nice with me. We might join together, and get on as best we could. I don't put on any uppish airs; I don't say that that couldn't have happened. Only, what's the use, when I don't feel inclined? I have been at Madame Fauconnier's for the last fortnight. The children are at school. I have work, I am quite content as it is. Well, the best thing seems to be to stay as I am."

And she stooped to take up her basket.

"You make me stop and talk, and they must be waiting for me at Madame's. Come, come, you will find someone else, Monsieur Coupeau, prettier than I am, and without two urchins at her heels."

He looked at the clock over the glass, and insisted on her sitting down again, saying,—

"Wait a bit! it is only five-and-twenty to twelve. I have five-and-twenty minutes left. You needn't fear I sha'n't behave: the table is between us! Or do you dislike me so much that you won't have even a little chat with me?"

She put down the basket again, so as not to seem rude, and they had a friendly talk. She had had her meal before taking out the clothes; he had hurried through his soup and beef so as to be on the look-out for her. Gervaise, all the while she answered his questions, quite amiably, looked out of the window, where the hour of *déjeuner* brought together an extraordinary crush of people.

All along both footpaths, in the narrow squeeze of the street, there was a hurry of steps, a swinging of arms, an elbowing without end. Workmen who had been detained over their work, grim and hungry of aspect, strode across the street to the baker's opposite; then, with their bread under their arms, went three doors higher up to the "Veau à Deux Têtes," to the threepenny ordinary. And close to the baker's there was a fruiterer, who sold fried potatoes and mussels cooked in parsley; a constant relay of work-girls in long aprons carried off screws of fried potatoes and mussels in cups; others, pretty, dainty-looking girls with bare heads, bought bundles of radishes. When Gervaise leaned forward she could see also a pork-butcher's, crowded with people, from which streams of children came out, holding in their hands, wrapped up in greasy paper, a little chop, a sausage, or a bit of hot black-pudding. Meanwhile, along the pavement, slimy with black mud, even in fine weather, under the trampling of many feet, a few workmen already made their way out of the eating-houses, and strolled downwards in little groups, replete with feeding, slow and composed in the midst of all the hustling crowd.

A group began to form at the door of the "Assommoir."

"I say, Bibi-la-Grillade," cried a husky voice, "are you going to stand the booze?"

Five workmen came in, and stood up by the bar.

"Ah! isn't he an old cheat, Père Colombe?" continued the voice. "The good old stuff for us, you know, and not thimble-fulls—proper glasses!"

Père Colombe placidly served everybody. Three more workmen came in. Little by little a crowd of blouses collected at the corner of the street, stopped there a short while, and then pushed in past the two dusty oleanders at the door.

"Don't be silly; you only think of those beastly things," said Gervaise to Coupeau. "Of course I was fond of him. Only, after the horrid way he left me . . . ."

They were talking of Lantier. Gervaise had not seen him again; she heard that he was living with Virginie's sister at La Glacière, in the house of that friend of his who was going to set up a hat factory. Besides, she had no inclination to run after him. At first it had been a great distress to her, she had even thought of throwing herself in the river; but by this time she had come to the conclusion that it was all for the best. Perhaps if Lantier had stayed on she would never have been able to bring up the children, so spendthrift was he. He might come and see Claude and Étienne if he would; she would not turn him out of doors. Only, as far as she was concerned, she would be hacked to bits before she would let him touch her with the tips of his fingers.

And she said all this in a quite convinced manner, as if she had mapped out her life quite clearly, whilst Coupeau, never losing sight of his desire of getting hold of her, turned it all into fun, made broad jokes and very crude questions on the subject of Lantier, shewing his white teeth so gaily that she could not take offence.

"It was you who used to beat him," he said at last. "Oh! you are not nice at all. You give the lash to folks!"

She interrupted him with a long peal of laughter. It was true, certainly, she had given the lash to that great hulking Virginie. At that moment she could have strangled anyone quite readily. And she laughed louder than ever when Coupeau told her that Virginie, distressed at having been made such an exhibition of, had left the neighbourhood. Meanwhile her face maintained a childlike sweetness; she stretched out her plump hands, declaring that she could not brush away a moth; all the blows she knew of were those she had received, pretty well all her life. Then she began to talk of her childhood at Plassans. She had never been one of those who ran after men; that did not amuse her; when Lantier had had her at fourteen, she had liked it because he said she was his little wife, and she wanted to play at housekeeping. It all came, she declared, of being too impressionable, too amiable with everybody, too ready to attach herself to people who only brought misery upon her. Thus, when she loved a man, it was not because she wanted to fool about; she only wanted to live with him always, perfectly happy. And when Coupeau chuckled, and

spoke of the two children, whom she had certainly not found in a cabbage, she rapped him over the knuckles, adding that of course she was built on the same lines as other women; only it was a mistake to fancy that women were always thinking of that; they had their household to look after, they were fagged out with housework, and when they got to bed at night they wanted to go to sleep at once. She was like her mother, too, a great worker, who died in childbirth, after having served old Macquart as beast of burden for more than twenty years. She herself was still quite slim, whilst her mother had had shoulders capable of demolishing the doors she came through; but they were alike in their obstinate attachment to people. Even her limp came to her from the poor woman, whom old Macquart used to beat black and blue. She had heard endless tales of nights when her father, coming home tipsy, had made love to his wife so brutally as to leave her all bruised; doubtless it was on one of those nights that she had been begotten, with her poor lame leg.

"Oh, it's a mere nothing, one scarcely notices it," said Coupeau, to flatter her.

She shook her head, knowing very well that it was quite visible; at forty she would be bent double. Then she said softly, with a little laugh,—

"It is so funny of you to like a woman who limps."

At that he leaned closer, his elbows still on the table, paying her yet more hardy compliments, trying to intoxicate her with flattery. But she only said no, inflexibly, though her ears were tickled by the wheedling

voice. She listened, looking out of the window, as if she were interested in watching the crowd outside. They were sweeping out the empty shops; the fruiterer removed his last panful of fried potatoes, whilst the pork-butcher put in order the disarranged plates on his counter. Bands of workmen poured out of all the eating-houses; great bearded chaps slapped one another on the back, romped like children, banging their great hob-nailed boots on the pavement, and scratching it with a slide; others, both hands thrust deep into their pockets, smoked philosophically, staring up at the sunlight, and blinking their eyes. Pavement, street, the very gutters, were flooded with the lazy crowd streaming out of open doors, blocked between passing carts, leaving a trail of blouses, of short jackets, of old overcoats, pale and colourless under the pale gold light that filled the street. Further off, factory bells tolled; but the workmen were in no hurry, lit their pipes again; then, after going across the road to another wine-shop, they made their way back to work, with bowed shoulders and dragging feet. Gervaise was amused by three workmen, one tall and two little, who turned back every ten yards; finally they got to the bottom of the street, and came straight over to the "Assommoir."

"They do feel Mondayish, those three!" she said, in a low voice.

"Hallo!" said Coupeau, "I know one of them, the tall one; it's Mes-Bottes, a pal of mine."

The "Assommoir" had filled up. Everyone talked loudly, and a sound of noisy shouts broke sharply through the oily murmur of hoarse voices. Every

now and again the blow of a fist on the counter made the glasses ring. The drinkers stood about in little groups, jammed tightly together, their hands behind their backs or their arms folded; some of them, back by the casks, had to wait a quarter of an hour before they could get their drinks from the bar.

"What! it's the swell Cadet-Cassis!" cried Mes-Bottes, giving Coupeau a hearty whack on the shoulder. "A gent who smokes cigarettes and wears a white shirt! Wants to shew off before his friends, does he? Must have his little delicacies!"

"Come now, leave me alone," said Coupeau, in a tone of annoyance.

The other man merely chuckled.

"Right you are, my bounder; keep yourself to yourself."

And he turned his back, with a horrible leer at Gervaise. She drew back, half frightened. The smoke of pipes, the strong odour of all these men, rose in the air, already charged with alcohol. It gave her a feeling of suffocation, and she began to cough.

"Drinking is horrid!" she said, in a low voice.

And she told how she used at one time to drink anisette with her mother at Plassans. But one day it made her quite ill, and that had disgusted her with drinking; she couldn't look at liquor.

"See," she added, pointing to her glass, "I have eaten my prune, but I shall leave the juice, it would quite upset me."

Coupeau, too, could not understand how one could go on drinking glass after glass of brandy. A prune now and again, that was all right. As for

spirits, absinthe, and that sort of mess—no, thanks, he would none of them. His pals might chaff him as much as they liked, he always stayed outside while those sots went crowding into the pubs. Old Coupeau, who like himself had been a zinc-worker, had dashed out his brains on the pavement of the Rue Coquenard, on one of his drunken days, by a fall from the roof of No. 25; and the memory of this kept the family all sober. When he went that way, and saw the place, he felt that he would rather drink out of the gutter than have a free drink at a bar. And he wound up,—

"In my business one wants firm legs."

Gervaise had picked up her basket once more. She did not rise, however, but sat holding it on her lap absent-mindedly, as if the young workman's words had called up all sorts of vague ideas in her mind. And she said slowly, without apparent transition,—

"I haven't any extravagant notions, you know; I am easily satisfied. My ideal would be to go on working quietly, to always have bread to eat, and a decent corner to sleep in; you know, a bed, two chairs, and a table—not more. And I should like to bring up my children honest, if I could. I should like, too, if I ever lived with anybody again, not to get knocked about; I don't at all relish the idea of being knocked about any more. But that's all, really, that's all."

She stopped to think, considering what she really wished for; but she could find nothing more of any importance. However, she went on, with a little hesitation,—

"Then, too, one would like to end quietly in one's bed. I have trudged about so much all my life, I should like to die in my own bed."

She got up. Coupeau, who agreed heartily with all her wishes, was already on his feet, looking anxiously at the time. But they did not go out at once; she was curious to go right through, behind the oak barrier, to see the great still of burnished brass working away under the glass roof of the little court; and the zinc-worker, who had followed her, explained all its working, pointing out the different pieces of the machine with his finger, shewing her the huge retort from which trickled a limpid stream of alcohol. The still, with its oddly-formed receivers, its endless coils of pipes, had a gloomy air; not a breath of steam escaped; one could only just perceive an internal murmur, a subterranean grumbling; it was like some deed of darkness done at mid-day, by a grim, mighty, and speechless toiler. Meanwhile, Mes-Bottes, with his two companions, had come to lean over the rail, waiting till a corner of the bar was free. He had a laugh like the creaking of a pulley, he shook his head, gazing at the drink-producing machine with watery eyes. It was a damned nice thing to look at! Why, in that big-bellied copper, there was enough to whet one's whistle for a week on end. He would have liked to have the end of that "worm" soldered to the roof of his mouth, so that he might feel the hot liquor trickle down inside him, down to his very heels, endlessly, like a flowing stream. Lord! that would just suit him; how much better it would be than the thimble-

fuls of that scamp of a Colombe! And his pals all laughed, saying that good old Mes-Bottes could jaw! Meanwhile, the still, without a flicker or a sound, went on exuding its stream of alcohol, like a slow, inexhaustible fountain-head, which would gradually flow out over all the place, which would spread over the outer boulevards, which would inundate Paris itself, gaping monstrously down below. Gervaise shivered and drew back, trying to smile, as she murmured,—

"I'm silly, but it gives me the creeps; drink always gives me the creeps."

Then, going back to her notion of perfect happiness,—

"Don't you think so? Don't you think that is the best that can happen, to get work to do, bread to eat, a hole and corner of one's own, to bring up the children, and to die in one's bed?"

"And not get knocked about," added Coupeau, gaily. "But I shan't beat you, if you don't wish it, Madame Gervaise. You needn't fear, I never drink, and I'm much too fond of you. Come now, to-night, we'll warm our tootsies together."

He had lowered his voice, whispering in her ear, whilst she made her way through the crowd of men, holding her wash-basket in front of her. But she said, "No, no," shaking her head again and again. Yet she turned and smiled back on him, and seemed pleased to find that he did not drink. She would doubtless have said yes if she had not sworn to keep away from men in future. At last they reached the door, and went out, leaving behind them

the crowded "Assommoir," which puffed out into the very street its husky murmur of voices and its thick, sweet odour of spirits. Mes-Bottes was telling old Colombe that he was a bad lot, he had only half filled his glass. But he was game, he was, a good sort, not the man to knuckle under. Confound it all! the boss would have to get on as best he could; he wasn't going back to his beat, he felt lurgy. And he invited his two companions to go with him to the "Petit Bonhomme qui Tousse," a pub at the Barrière Saint-Denis, where you get real good stuff.

"Ah! I can breathe again!" said Gervaise, finding herself on the pavement.

"Well, good-bye, and thanks, Monsieur Coupeau, I must get back at once."

And she began to move up the boulevard, but he seized her hand, would not let go, insisting,—

"Just come around with me by way of the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, it's hardly out of your way. I must go and see my sister before I go back to the yard. We can go along together."

She finally consented, and they went slowly up the Rue des Poissonniers, side by side. She did not take his arm. He spoke to her of his family; the mother, an old waistcoat-hand, looked after the house, for her sight was failing. She was sixty-two on the third of last month. He was the youngest. One of his sisters, Madame Lerat, a young widow of thirty-six, worked at the flowers, and lived in the Rue des Moines, at Batignolles. The other, who was thirty, had married a chain-maker, the sharp-tongued Lorilleux. It was to their house that he was going, in the Rue de

la Goutte-d'Or. They lodged in the large house on the right. He had his supper every night with the Lorilleux; it saved something all round. Indeed, he was going there now to tell them not to expect him, because he had been invited out that day by a friend.

Gervaise, who had been attending to what he was saying, suddenly interrupted him to ask smilingly,—

"Is your name Cadet-Cassis, Monsieur Coupeau?"

"Oh," he replied, "that's only a nickname the fellows have given me, because I generally take a cassis when they insist on my having a drink. One may as well be called Cadet-Cassis as Mes-Bottes!"

"Indeed, yes, it is not at all bad, Cadet-Cassis," she answered.

And she questioned him about his work. He was always at work now over yonder, behind the *octroi* wall, at the new hospital. Oh! there was always plenty of work to be had, he should certainly not leave the place this year. There were yards and yards of gutters to be done.

"You know I can see the Hôtel Boncœur," he said, "when I am up there. You were at the window yesterday, and I waved my arms to you, but you didn't see me."

They had already gone about a hundred yards along the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, when he suddenly stopped, lifted his eyes, and said,—

"This is the house. I was born only just on there, at No. 22. But the house here, all the same,

is a jolly bit of masonry. It's as big as a barrack inside."

Gervaise looked up, and examined the front of the house. It had five stories looking on the street, each with fifteen windows in a line; their black and dilapidated shutters gave an aspect of desolation to the immense frontage. Four shops occupied the ground floor; on the right of the entrance, a great greasy eating-house; on the left, a coal merchant's, a haberdasher's, and an umbrella shop. The house looked all the bigger because it was built between two little low rickety buildings on each side; and, with its square bulk, like a block of mortar roughly thrown together, crumbling and chipping under the rain, it stood out in relief against the sky, high over the neighbouring roofs, with its huge rough cubic mass, its dingy, unplastered sides, stark and interminable as prison-walls, in which the rows of dentated ornament seemed like decrepit jaws gaping. But Gervaise noticed particularly the doorway, an immense round door, rising to the second story, and having a deep porch, at the other end of which could be seen the dim daylight of a large courtyard. Under the porch, in the middle of the paving stones, a gutter carried off a stream of pink-coloured water.

"Come in," said Coupeau, "they won't eat you."

She preferred to wait for him outside. Still, she could not help making her way under the porch, as far as the *concierge's* lodge, and then she looked up once more. Inside, the elevation had six stories, four regular sides surrounding the huge square of the court-yard. The walls were grey, eaten away with

a yellow rot, marked in long streaks by the drippings of the roofs; they rose straight up in the air, from the paving-stones to the slates, without a single moulding; only the waste-pipes curved out at the different stories, where the gaping mouths of the gulleys left a stain of rusty iron. The windows had no shutters, the curtainless glass had the greenish hue of muddy water. Some of them were wide open, with mattresses, patterned in blue squares, hanging out to air; outside, other linen was hung out to dry on lines, the whole washing of the establishment, men's shirts, women's under-bodices, children's breeches; at one, on the third story, there was a child's diaper, all plastered with dirt. From top to bottom, these narrow lodgments burst their way out, shewing the fag-ends of their misery at every crevice. Below, at the corner of each wall, a narrow doorway, without wainscotting, taken sheer out of the plaster, opened on a cracked lobby, at the end of which rose the slimy steps of an iron-railed staircase; one counted four staircases, indicated by the first four letters of the alphabet painted on the wall. The ground floors were laid out in huge workshops, their windows black with dust; one saw through them the flame of a locksmith's forge; further on could be heard the plane of a carpenter; whilst near the lodge, from a dyer's laboratory, there escaped in big bubbles the runlet of pink-coloured water that ran out under the porch. Messy with puddles of various colours, with shavings and cinders, with a ring of grass growing all round between the stones, the court-yard was lit by the strong sunlight,

as if it were divided in two by a line drawn sharply across. In the shade, around the tap that leaked continually, three little hens scratched the ground with their dirty claws, looking for earth-worms. And Gervaise looked slowly up and down, from the sixth story to the ground, and up again, overwhelmed by the hugeness of the place, feeling as if she were in the midst of a living organism, in the very heart of a city, interested by the house as if it were some great living giant.

"Do you want anyone?" asked the *concierge*, puzzled, coming out to the door of the lodge.

But the young woman explained that she was waiting for someone. She turned back in the direction of the street; then, as Coupeau still delayed, she returned for another look, as if drawn by some fascination. The house seemed to her by no means ugly. Here and there, among the odds and ends at the windows, were touches of gaiety, a stock in a pot, a cage of canaries all a-twitter, shaving glasses which sparkled like round stars in the depths of shadow. Below, a carpenter was singing to the accompaniment of the regular hiss of his plane; while in the locksmith's shop a clang of hammers falling in cadence gave out a silvery ring. At almost every open casement, against a background of wretchedness just visible, there were the laughing, tangled heads of children, women sewing, with their calm profiles bent over the work. *Déjeuner* was over, work was beginning again, the men had all gone out to their occupations, and the house returned to its customary tranquillity, broken only by the regular sounds that went on without intermission

all day long. The court struck her as a little damp. If she had to live there she would rather be on the sunny side, right at the end. She made five or six steps, breathing the musty odour of poor people's houses, an odour of long-lying dust, of rancid dirt; but as the sharpness of the dyer's washes predominated, she disliked the smell less than that of the Hôtel Boncœur. And she picked out a particular window that she would like, one in the left corner, where there was a little window-box planted with scarlet runners, whose slim tendrils were beginning to twist upwards around a trellis-work of string.

"Have I kept you waiting?" said Coupeau, all at once, behind her. "It is quite a job when I am not going to have dinner with them, especially to-day, as my sister had bought some veal."

And as she made a little movement of surprise he went on, looking round the place in his turn,—

"You are looking at the house. It is all let from top to bottom. There are about three hundred lodgers, I believe. If I had any furniture, I should look out for a little room here myself. It is nice here, isn't it?"

"Yes, it is nice here," murmured Gervaise. "At Plassans there were not so many people in all our street. Look, isn't that window pretty, up there on the fifth story, with the runners?"

At that he returned obstinately to the attack. As soon as they had a bed, they would take that room. But she hurried out, begging him not to begin it all over again; the house might crumble to bits, but she certainly wouldn't share a bed with him. Never-

theless, when Coupeau left her before Madame Fauconnier's laundry, she let him hold her hand in his for a moment, in the friendliest manner.

These friendly relations between the two went on for a month. She seemed to him very plucky to go on as she did, slaving all day, looking after the children, finding time in the evening for all sorts of little sewing-jobs. Some women were anything but tidy, fond of eating and gadding about; but she was not one of that sort, sure enough, she took things much too seriously.

At that she laughed, and made modest objections. She had not always been sensible, worse luck! Had she not slept with a man at fourteen? Didn't she use to drink anisette with her mother? She had learnt by experience, that was all. It was not true that she was strong-minded; on the contrary, she was very weak; she went wherever she was led, not wanting to give anyone trouble. She only wanted to keep good company, for bad company, she declared, bowled you over, did for a woman in less than no time.

And she shuddered in thinking of the future, comparing herself to a penny tossed up, heads or tails, as luck fell. What she had seen already, all the bad examples she had had before her as a child, had given her a good lesson. But Coupeau laughed at her gloomy notions, told her to keep up her courage, and tried to put his arm round her waist. She pushed him back, rapping his fingers, while he cried, laughing, that she was not easy to get hold of, for a weak woman. He was gay and confident, and

did not trouble about the future. One day brought another, and there you were. One would always have a bit and a crumb somewhere. The neighbourhood seemed to him decent enough but for a pack of drunkards, who ought to be kicked into the gutter. He was not a bad sort of fellow, could talk at times very sensibly, and was even a bit of a dandy, with his hair carefully parted at the side, his bright ties, his shining boots on Sunday. And he was as cheeky as a monkey, he had the quizzical drollery of a genuine Paris workman, a regular chatterbox, so charmingly young too.

They both did one another all sorts of little services at the Hôtel Boncœur. Coupeau got the milk for her, did her errands, carried her washing bundles; often in the evening, if he came home first, he would take the children for a walk along the boulevard. Gervaise in return went up to his little room under the roof, turned over his clothes, and sewed on buttons or mended his canvas jackets. They were now on terms of the utmost familiarity, and she was never bored when he was there, with his street songs, his street jokes, all so new to her. And Coupeau, with a woman always about, became more set on her than ever. He was smitten this time, sure enough; and at last it became quite awkward. He only laughed as before, but he felt so upset that all the fun of the thing was gone. He still fooled about, and could never meet her without crying, "When is it to be?"

She knew what he meant, and she promised it for the fourth Thursday of the week. Then he tried

teasing her, and would come down with his slippers in his hand, as if to take up his abode. She turned it off as a joke, and was not in the least discomposed by the fishy atmosphere in which he made her live. As long as he was not brutal, she could stand anything. She only got angry once, when, in trying to snatch a kiss from her, he had pulled out some hair from her head.

Towards the end of June, Coupeau lost his spirits, and got quite out of sorts. Troubled by certain looks that he gave her, Gervaise barricaded the door at night. Then, after a tiff which had lasted from Sunday to Tuesday, he came one night about eleven o'clock knocking at her door. She would not open it; but he spoke to her so quietly, and in quite a shaky voice, that at last she drew aside the chest of drawers from before the door. When he had come in she thought he must be ill, he looked so pale, with his haggard face and red eyes. He stood before her, shaking his head, stammering out a few words. No, he was not ill. But he had been up in his room crying, crying like a child, biting the pillow so that his neighbours should not hear. He had not slept now for three nights. He could not go on any longer.

"Look here, Madame Gervaise," he said, chokingly, almost on the point of crying again, "we must put an end to all this. Let's go and get married. I want to; I've made up my mind."

Gervaise looked greatly surprised. She was very grave.

"Oh, Monsieur Coupeau!" she murmured, "what is it you are saying to me? I never have

asked you for that, as you know. I couldn't do such a thing. Oh, no, no, this is a serious matter; think it over, I beg of you."

But he continued to shake his head with an air of unalterable resolution. He had thought it all out. He had come down to her so that he might get some sleep that night. She would not surely send him back to his misery like that. If she would only say yes, he would bother her no further; she could go to bed in peace. He merely wanted to hear her say yes. They would talk it over next day.

"Surely, I shall not say yes like that," replied Gervaise. "I wouldn't have you say, later on, that I made you do a foolish thing. Look here, Monsieur Coupeau, you should not be so headstrong. You don't know your own mind about me, really. If you were not to see me for a week I'd wager that it would all pass off. Very often men marry for the sake of one night, the first one, and then night follows night, day after day, a whole lifetime, and they repent bitterly of their bargain. But sit down, we must talk it out straight away."

Then, up to one o'clock in the morning, in the dim room, lit only by a smoky candle that they forgot to snuff, they discussed the project of marriage, in low voices, so as not to disturb the two children, Claude and Étienne, who breathed quietly, both heads on the same pillow. And Gervaise came back again and again to the subject of the children, pointing them out to Coupeau; that was an odd sort of dowry to bring with her, she could not really put such a burden on his shoulders. And then she was

ashamed, on his behalf. What would the neighbours say? They knew all about her and her lover; it would not be decent to go and get married two months after. To all these good reasons, Coupeau answered by shrugging his shoulders. Pretty much he cared for the neighbours! He didn't stick his nose into other people's affairs; he preferred not to dirty it, indeed! Well, and if she *had* had Lantier before him, where was the harm? She wasn't living on the loose; she didn't bring men home with her, as lots of women did—ladies! As for the children, they were all right, they would grow up. Never could he find another woman so plucky, so good, so full of all sorts of qualities. Besides, it was not that; she might have rolled in the gutter, she might be ugly, lazy, and odious, she might have a whole series of dirty brats, that would not count in his eyes; he wanted her, and her only.

"Yes, I want *you*," he repeated, hammering his fist on his knee. "You understand, I want *you*. I don't see there is anything more to say."

Little by little Gervaise gave way. An abandonment of heart and senses invaded her, before this brutal desire which seemed to envelop her. She hazarded only a few timid objections, her hands crossed on her lap, her face softened. Through the half-opened window the warm June night came in sultry breaths, making the long red wick of the candle gutter; through the heavy silence of the slumbering neighbourhood one could hear only the sobs of a drunkard, who lay on his back in the middle of the road, sobbing like a child; whilst at a distance,

in some restaurant, a violin played a vulgar quadrille for some late revellers, a faint crystalline music, clear and thin as the sound of a harmonica. Coupeau, seeing Gervaise at the end of her arguments, silent and vaguely smiling, seized her hands and drew her towards him. She was at one of those moments of abandonment, to which she knew herself so liable, won over at last, and too weak to refuse anything, to disappoint anyone. But Coupeau did not see that she surrendered herself to him; he merely squeezed her wrists tight until he nearly bruised them, taking possession of her so; and they had a long sigh, both of them, at this little pain, given and taken, in which their tenderness found vent.

"It is yes?" he asked.

"How you torment me!" she murmured, "Must I? Well then, yes! Good Lord! I think we are both very foolish."

He got up, seized her by the waist, and gave her a hearty kiss on the face, quite at random. The noise of the kiss startled him, and he looked over at Claude and Etienne, stepping softly, and lowering his voice.

"Hush! he said, "we mustn't wake the kids. Good-bye till to-morrow."

And he went back to his room. Gervaise, all of a tremble, sat down on the edge of her bed, and stayed there for more than hour without thinking of undressing. She was deeply moved, she thought it very good of Coupeau, for at one moment she had fancied it was all over—that he would go to bed with her there and then. The drunkard, below in

the street, made a harsher noise, like a lost animal. The jigging violin in the distance had ceased.

For the next few days, Coupeau tried to induce Gervaise to come and see his sister, some evening, at the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. But she was very nervous, and seemed terrified at the idea of going to see the Lorilleux. She saw clearly that he was in terror of the whole family. No doubt it was not his sister's concern, she was not even the elder. The mother would give her consent in a minute, for she never contradicted her son. Only the Lorilleux were supposed, in the family, to earn ten francs a day; and on that account they wielded a certain authority. Coupeau would never dare marry her unless they all agreed to accept his wife.

"I have spoken to them about you," he explained to Gervaise; "they know all about our plans. What a silly child you are! Come to-night. You are quite prepared, aren't you? You will find my sister a little stiff. Lorilleux, too, is not always quite amiable. At heart they are vexed, because, if I marry, I shall not take my meals with them any more, and that won't be so economical for them. But that doesn't matter; they won't turn you out of doors. Do this much for me; it is absolutely necessary."

These words frightened Gervaise still more. One Saturday night, however, she gave in. Coupeau called for her at half-past nine. She had her things on, a black dress, a shawl of thin woollen stuff with a pattern of yellow palm leaves, and a white bonnet trimmed with lace. During the six weeks she had been at work she had saved up the seven francs for

the shawl, and the two francs fifty for the bonnet; the dress was an old one cleaned and done up.

"They are expecting you," said Coupeau, as they made their way through the Rue des Poissonniers. "Oh! they are beginning to get used to the idea of my marrying. They are in a very good humour to-night. Then if you have never seen people making gold chains it will amuse you to see it. They have just had an urgent order for Monday.

"Have they got gold there?" asked Gervaise.

"I should think so! On the walls, on the ground—everywhere."

Meanwhile they had reached the great porch and crossed the court. The Lorilleux lived on the sixth story, staircase B. Coupeau told her laughingly to hold on to the banister and not let go. She raised her eyes, blinking her eyelids as she saw the tall cavity of the staircase, lit with three gas-burners, one at every two stories; the furthest, at the very top, looked like a star flickering in a dark sky, whilst the two others glared irregularly across the interminable spiral ascent.

"Ha!" said the zinc-worker, pausing on the first landing, "that smells deuced like onion soup. Somebody has certainly been having onion soup."

Staircase B, grey and filthy, with its greasy steps and rails, its walls from which the plaster was dropping, was indeed full of the odour of cooking. On each landing there were long corridors, loud and echoing; there was an opening of doors, painted yellow, and blackened at the lock by the dirt of hands; and at the level of the window, the gulleys

gave out a fetid odour, which mixed with the sharp smell of boiled onions. From ground floor to sixth story could be heard the clatter of dishes, of frying-pans moved, of saucepans scraped with spoons to scour them. On the first story, Gervaise saw, through a half-open door on which the word "Draughtsman" was painted in large letters, two men sitting before a table on which a large prepared canvas was outspread; they were talking excitedly, amidst the smoke of their pipes. The second and third stories were quieter; one heard only the rocking of a cradle, a child crying, a woman's loud voice mingled with the sound of running water, in which the words were drowned; and Gervaise saw various names on cards nailed to the door: "Madame Gaudron, wool-carder," and further on, "Monsieur Madinier, cardboard-maker." There was a fight going on at the fourth story; a trampling which shook the floor, furniture knocked about, a horrible uproar of blows and curses; while the neighbours opposite went on with a game of cards, the door open to let in a breath of air. When Gervaise reached the fifth story she was quite out of breath; she was not accustomed to going up so many stairs, and this turning wall, this series of glimpses into interiors, bewildered her. A whole family blocked up the landing; the father was washing plates on a little stove by the window, whilst the mother, leaning against the banister, was wiping the baby before putting it to bed. Coupeau urged on Gervaise with what encouragement he could, and at last they reached the sixth story. Coupeau turned to her with a smile;

they were at the top. She looked about her to find where a voice was coming from, a voice she had heard all the way, shrill and piercing, above all the other sounds. It was a little old woman in an attic, singing as she dressed her sixpenny dolls. As a tall girl, carrying a pail, re-entered a room near by, Gervaise had a glimpse of a tumbled bed on which a man in his shirt-sleeves was sprawling lazily; on the door a visiting-card, written by hand, announced, "Mademoiselle Clémence, Ironing done." Then, stiff and panting, she leaned curiously over the banister; now it was the lowest gas-burner which looked like a star, at the foot of the six stories; and the smells, the rumbling sound of the whole huge place came up all in one breath—a great puff of heat against her anxious face, leaning forward as at the edge of a pit.

"We haven't got there yet," said Coupeau. "Oh! it is a regular journey."

He led the way down a long corridor on the left, turning twice, first to the left, then again to the right. The corridor went on further still, going both ways, cramped, dilapidated, and unplastered, lit at long intervals by a tiny flame of gas; and the doors, all of one pattern, like the doors of a prison or a monastery, and almost all wide open, displayed, one after another, miserable interiors, filled, this hot June evening, with a sort of reddish haze. At last they reached a bit of passage completely dark.

"Here we are," said Coupeau. "Be careful, keep close to the wall; there are three steps."

Gervaise went forward cautiously about a dozen paces stumbling as she came to the three steps.

Meanwhile, at the end of the passage, Coupeau pushed open a door without knocking. A bright light fell on the floor of the passage. They went in.

It was a narrow, tunnel-like place, which seemed like a continuation of the passage. A faded woollen curtain, caught up by a piece of string, separated the place in two. The first compartment contained a bed, pushed under an angle of the sloping roof, a cast-iron stove, still warm after the dinner, two chairs, a table, and a cupboard, which had had to have the cornice sawn off before it could be got between the bed and the door. The second compartment was the work-room; at the other end was a little forge with its bellows; on the right, a vice rivetted to the wall, under a shelf on which were bits of old iron; on the left, near the window, a tiny bench, littered with microscopic pincers, nippers, and saws, all very dirty and oily.

"Here we are!" cried Coupeau, advancing as far as the curtain.

But at first no one replied. Gervaise, quite confused, especially by the idea that she was coming into a place full of gold, kept behind Coupeau, stammering out something, and nodding at random by way of salutation. The bright light, coming from the lamp on the bench and the brazier of coal in the forge, increased her bewilderment. At last she saw Madame Lorilleux, short, ruddy, and thick-set, pulling away with all the vigour of her short arms, and with the aid of a pincers, at a black metal wire which she inserted in the holes of a draw-plate attached to the vice. Before the bench, Lorilleux, equally short as his wife,

but slighter of build, plied his pincers with a monkey-like vivacity, working on something so minute that it was lost to sight between his bony fingers. It was he who was the first to raise his head, a head partially bald, long, sickly, and yellow as old wax.

"Ah, it's you; all right!" he murmured. "We are awfully busy, you know. Don't come into the work-room, you'll be in our way. Stay where you are."

And he went on with his work again, his face once more in the greenish shadow of a bowl of water, through which the lamp cast a ray of vivid light on his work.

"Sit down, won't you?" cried Madame Lorilleux in her turn. "This is the lady, isn't it? Good, good!"

She had wound the wire, and now she took it over to the forge, where, stirring the brazier with a large wooden fan, she put it to heat again before passing it into the last holes of the draw-plate.

Coupeau moved the chairs forward, and made Gervaise sit down by the curtain. The room was so narrow that he could not bestow himself by her side, so he sat down behind, and whispered in her ear, explaining all that was going on. The young woman, taken aback by the strange reception of the Lorilleux, and uneasy under their sidelong glances, had a humming in her ears which hindered her from hearing anything. The wife seemed to her old for her thirty years, surly in her manner and untidy in appearance, with her pigtail of hair hanging down on her unbuttoned under-bodice. The husband, older

by a year only, looked to her quite an old man; he had thin malicious lips, was in his shirt-sleeves, and his bare feet were thrust into slippers down at heel. And what amazed her the most was the smallness of the work-room, the smeary walls, the tarnished iron of the tools, the dirtiness of everything about, like a vendor's of old nails. It was frightfully hot. Drops of sweat stood out on the livid forehead of Lorilleux, and Madame Lorilleux pulled off her white bodice, working away with bare arms, her chemise plastered over her pendent breasts.

"But the gold?" whispered Gervaise.

She looked all round the place, peering under all the muck to find the splendour she had fancied.

Coupeau burst out laughing.

"The gold?" he said; "why there is some, and there, at your very feet!"

He pointed successively to the thin wire on which his sister was working, and to another bundle of wire, like a coil of iron-wire, which hung on the wall near the vice; then, going down on hands and knees, he picked up, under the board for chips which lay on the workshop floor, a paring of gold-leaf, a tiny scrap like the point of a rusty needle. Gervaise exclaimed that couldn't be gold, that black stuff as ugly as iron! He bit the paring and shewed her the shining notch left by his teeth. And he went on with his explanation: the employers provided the gold-wire in its alloy; the workers first of all passed it through the draw-plate in order to get it to the required size, taking care to heat it five or six times over during the operation, so as not to break it. It needed a good

strong wrist, and a knack as well. His sister would not let her husband touch the draw-plate because he coughed. She had splendid arms; he had seen her draw the gold-wire as fine as a hair.

Meanwhile Lorilleux, taken with a turn of coughing, doubled up on his stool. In the midst of his fit, he said in a choked voice, without looking at Gervaise, as if he stated the matter for her benefit,—

"I make the links."

Coupeau insisted on Gervaise getting up. If she would go nearer she could see. The chain-maker consented with a growl. He twined the wire prepared by his wife round a mandrel, a very thin steel rod. Then he drew the saw lightly along, cutting the wire along the whole length of the mandrel, each ring forming a curb. Then he welded them together. The curbs were laid on a large piece of charcoal. He moistened them with a drop of borax, which he took from the bottom of a broken glass by his side, and rapidly reddened them at the lamp, under the horizontal flame of the chimney. Then, when he had a hundred curbs, he returned to his delicate work, leaning over on the plug, a little piece of thin board which his hands had made quite shiny. He twisted loop after loop with the pincers, pressed it on one side, brought it through the loop above it, already in its place, re-opened it with the assistance of a pointed tool; and it was all done with an uninterrmittent regularity, curb succeeding curb with such rapidity that the chain began to lengthen out slowly under the very eyes of Gervaise, without her quite understanding how it was done.

"Those are the links," said Coupeau. "There is the small-link, the heavy-curb, the chain-link. But Lorilleux only makes this particular kind."

Lorilleux gave a chuckle of satisfaction. As he went on twisting his curbs, hardly visible between his black nails, he exclaimed,—

"I say, Cadet-Cassis! I was making a little calculation this morning. I began when I was twelve—well, do you know what length of curb I must have made, up to now?"

He raised his pale face, blinking his red eyelids.

"Eight thousand yards! do you hear? Nearly five miles! Fancy! a chain five miles long! It is long enough to go round the neck of all the females in the neighbourhood. And you see it is always getting longer. I hope to get from Paris to Versailles."

Gervaise had gone back to her seat quite disillusioned. It all seemed to her very ugly. She smiled, to please the Lorilleux. But what made her feel particularly awkward was the silence in regard to her marriage, the matter of such importance to her, without which she would certainly not have come. The Lorilleux continued to treat her as if she were some inquisitive bore brought in by Coupeau. And when a conversation was at last started, it was confined entirely to the people who lodged in the house. Madame Lorilleux asked her brother if he had heard the people on the fourth floor fighting as he came up. Those Bénards went for each other every day; the husband came in drunk as a pig; the wife too, wasn't entirely without blame, she used the most filthy

language. Then they spoke of the draughtsman on the first floor, that sponger Baudequin, a *poseur*, who was in debt all round, always smoking, always jawing away with his friends. The cardboard business of M. Madinier was on its last legs. The master had turned off two work-girls the day before; it would serve him right if he came to smash, for he spent everything on drink; he left his children without a shirt to their back. Madame Gaudron went on in a funny sort of way; she was going to have another child, which was hardly reasonable at her age. The landlord had just given the sack to the fifth-floor Coquets; they owed for three quarters; besides, they would insist on lighting their stove out on the landing, and only last Saturday, Mademoiselle Remanjou, the old woman who lived on the sixth floor, going downstairs with her dolls, was only just in time to save the little Linguerlot from getting badly burnt. As for Mademoiselle Clémence, who took in ironing, she might carry on as she pleased, but one couldn't complain, she adored animals, she had a real good heart. What a pity a fine girl like that went after all the men! One would see her walking the streets some day or other.

"Here you are, here is another," said Lorilleux to his wife, giving her the chain on which he had been working since *déjeuner*. "You can finish it off."

And he added with the insistence of a man who does not easily let go a joke,—

"Four feet and a half more. I am getting nearer Versailles."

Meanwhile Madame Lorilleux was finishing off

the chain, after having once more heated it by passing it through the regulator draw-plate. Finally she put it in a little brass saucepan with a long handle, filled with lye-wash, and dipped it into the flame of the forge. Gervaise, pushed forward again by Coupeau, had to follow this last operation. When the chain had been passed through the fire it turned a dull red colour. It was finished, ready to send in.

"It is sent in in the rough," Coupeau explained. "The polishers rub it up afterwards."

Gervaise felt that she could endure it no longer. The room became hotter and hotter, and she was stifling. The door has to be kept shut, because the least draught gave Lorilleux a cold. Then, as no allusion was made to the marriage, she was anxious to be gone; and she gave Coupeau's jacket a little pull. He understood what she meant. He too was growing embarrassed and annoyed by this affectation of silence.

"Well, we are off," he said. "We'll leave you to your work."

He moved uneasily about for a moment, waiting, hoping for a word, some sort of reference. At last he made up his mind to break into the subject himself.

"I say, Lorilleux, we depend on you. You will be my wife's witness, won't you?"

The chain-maker raised his head, pretending to be surprised, and gave a chuckle; whilst his wife, leaving the draw-plates, planted herself in the middle of the workshop.

"You really mean it, then?" he murmured.

"One never knows, with that damned Cadet-Cassis, whether he means a thing or not."

"Ah, yes! so this is the lady," said Madame Lorilleux, looking Gervaise in the face. "Lord! we haven't any advice to give you, as far as we are concerned. It is rather an odd idea to go and get married, all the same. However, if you have quite agreed about that . . . . When it doesn't succeed it is one's own fault, that is all. And it doesn't often succeed; not often, not often."

Her voice lingered over the last words, and she shook her head, looking Gervaise up and down from head to foot, as if she would like to have examined every inch of her body. She evidently found her better than she had expected.

"My brother is quite free," she continued, in a more acid tone. "No doubt his family would have preferred . . . . One always has one's projects. But things fall out so oddly. For my part, I have no wish to raise a dispute. If he had brought to me the lowest of the low, I should have said, 'Marry her by all means, and say no more about it.' Still, he used to get on all right with us here. He looks plump enough; it is evident he hasn't starved. Always had his hot soup, right to the minute. I say, Lorilleux, doesn't it occur to you that the lady is something like Thérèse, you know, the woman opposite, who died of consumption?"

"Yes, there is a sort of resemblance," replied the chain-maker.

"And then there are your two children, madam. Indeed, I remarked to my brother, 'I don't under-

stand, for my part, how you can marry a woman with two children.' You musn't mind, if I look at it from his side; it is quite natural. And you don't look very strong, either. Isn't it so, Lorilleux, the lady doesn't look strong?"

"No, no, she isn't strong."

They said nothing about her limp. But Gervaise understood, by their sidelong glances, and the movement of their lips, that they were alluding to it. She stood up before them, drawing her little palm-leaf shawl tightly about her, and replying in monosyllables as if she were before a judge. Coupeau, seeing her distress, cried at last,—

"That's not the last word on the subject. Whatever you like to say, it won't make any difference. The wedding will take place on Saturday, the 29th of July. I looked it up in the almanac. You understand, then? that will suit you?"

"Oh yes, of course, that will suit us," said his sister. "You really need not have consulted us. I shall not hinder Lorilleux from acting as witness. I only want to keep friends."

Gervaise bent her head, not knowing what to do with herself, and catching her foot in one of the squares of wood with which the work-room was covered, she stooped down, fumbling with her hand, fearing she had displaced something. Lorilleux moved the lamp sharply over. He looked suspiciously at her hands.

"You must be careful," he said, "little bits of gold stick on to one's feet, and one carries it away without knowing."

It was quite a job. The employers would not allow you so much as a grain of waste. And he displayed the hare's foot with which he brushed off the filaments of gold that remained behind on the plug and the leather on his knees, put there to catch them. The work-room was carefully swept out twice a week; all the dust and dirt was collected and burned, and the ashes searched, in which there was generally five-and-twenty or thirty francs' worth of gold a month.

Madame Lorilleux could not take her eyes off Gervaise's shoes.

"There is no harm meant," she said, with an amiable smile, "but perhaps the lady wouldn't mind looking at her shoes."

Gervaise, blushing deeply, sat down and turned up her shoes, to shew that there was nothing there. Coupeau had opened the door, calling out sharply, "Good-night!" He called her from outside, and she followed, after having stammered out some polite phrase: she hoped to see them again, and that they would be on good terms with one another. But the Lorilleux had already returned to their work at the dark end of the work-room, where the little forge shone like the last coal turning white in the fierce heat of a furnace. The wife, her chemise slipping down over one shoulder, her skin reddened by the reflection of the brazier, pulled away at another wire, the muscles in her neck swelling out at each effort like great cords. The husband, bending under the green light of the bowl of water, set to work once more on a chain, bent the curb with the pincers,

pressed it on one side, drew it through the curb above, opened it again with the assistance of a sharp-pointed tool, mechanically, unintermittently, without even stopping to wipe the sweat from his face.

When Gervaise came out on the landing, she could not help saying, with tears in her eyes,—

"That is not very promising for us."

Coupeau shook his head furiously. He would pay out Lorilleux for the way he had treated them that evening. Did one ever see such an old screw! to think they were going to rob him of three grains of his gold-dust! All their talk, it was nothing but sheer greed. Did his sister think he was never going to marry, so as to save her twopence on her *pot-au-feu?* Anyway, it should be the 29th of July, all the same. Much he cared for them!

But Gervaise was heavy at heart, seized with a sort of fear, as she picked her way downstairs in the shadow of the banisters. At that hour the staircase was deserted, lit only by the burner on the second floor, which, with its shrunken flame, down in those depths of darkness, looked like a night-light. Behind the closed doors there was a heavy silence, the dead sleep of workmen who had gone to bed the moment they got up from table. Only a hushed laugh came from the room of the girl who took in ironing, whilst a streak of light shone through the keyhole of Mademoiselle Remanjou, still at work with her scissors at the gauze dresses of her sixpenny dolls. Further down, at Madame Gaudron's, a child was crying. And the gulleys stank worse than ever in their deep quietude, black and silent.

Then, in the courtyard, as Coupeau sang out to the *concierge* to open the door, Gervaise turned and gave a last look at the house. It looked larger than ever under the moonless sky. The grey walls, as if cleansed of decay and whitewashed with shadow, broadened and lengthened; and they were barer and flatter than ever, without their day's dress of rags a-drying. The closed windows slept, only one here and there, brightly lit up, opened its eyes, seeming to squint out of certain corners. Over each vestibule, one above another, from top to bottom, the six windows on the landing, white and pallid, rose like a narrow tower of light. A ray of lamplight, coming from the bookbinder's on the second floor, left a yellow streak on the pavement of the court, striking through the dark shadows which enveloped the shops on the ground floor. And in their depths of shadow, in the damp corner, drops of water dripped one by one, loudly in the midst of the silence, from the leaky tap. And it seemed to Gervaise that the house was upon her, about to crush her, striking a chill to her shoulders. It was that foolish fear of hers again, a childishness which made her smile a moment after.

"Take care!" cried Coupeau.

And, in order to get out, she had to jump over a great puddle, which had trickled out of the dyer's. That day it was blue, the deep azure of a summer sky, which the little night-lamp of the *concierge* lit with stars.

CHAPTER III

Gervaise did not wish to have any wedding-party. Why spend the money? Then she was a little ashamed; it seemed needless to parade the wedding before all the neighbours. But Coupeau cried out on her; it was impossible to get married like that, without a bit of a feast. He didn't care a straw for the neighbours. Oh! something quite simple: a little outing in the afternoon, then they would just pick a bone at the first eating-house they came to. And no music at dessert, for certain, no one was to shake a leg; they would simply have a glass together and then everybody should go quietly back to bed.

The zinc-worker laughed and joked away, and Gervaise gave in when he had sworn there should be no larking. He would keep his eye on the glasses, and see that nobody got top-heavy. Thereupon he organized a feed at five francs a head at Auguste's, at the "Moulin-d'Argent," Boulevard de la Chapelle. It was a cheap wine-shop, with a dancing-hall at the back of the bar, under the three acacias of the courtyard. They would be all right on the first floor. For the next ten days he looked up guests

in his sister's house, Rue de la Goutte-d'Or: M. Madinier, Mademoiselle Remanjou, Madame Gaudron and her husband. He even induced Gervaise to let him bring two of his fellow-workmen, Bibi-la-Grillade and Mes-Bottes. No doubt Mes-Bottes usually got fuddled, but he had such a deuce of an appetite that they always invited him to a little dinner for the sake of the long face that was always pulled by the landlord when he saw what the blooming guzzler could stow away. Gervaise, for her part, promised to bring Madame Fauconnier, for whom she worked, and the Boches, very good people. That would make fifteen altogether; quite enough, for with too many people it always ends in a dispute.

Meanwhile, Coupeau had absolutely no money. Without having a showy affair, he wished to do everything decently. He borrowed fifty francs from his employer. Out of that he bought the wedding-ring, a twelve-franc gold ring, which Lorilleux got for him at wholesale price for nine francs. Then he ordered a frock-coat, a waistcoat, and a pair of trousers, from a tailor in the Rue Myrrha, to whom he gave twenty-five francs in part payment; his patent leathers and his tile might still pass muster. When he had put aside his ten francs for the feed, his own score and that of Gervaise (the children could be thrown into the bargain), there remained just six francs, the price of a mass at the Altar of the Poor. He didn't care much about the crows, certainly; it went to his heart to give his six francs to those greedy grabs, who didn't want all that to clear their throats. But a marriage without a mass (the saying went)

was no marriage at all. He went to the church himself in order to make a bargain, and for an hour he slanged away with a little old priest in a dirty cassock, as grasping as a Jew. He felt inclined to box his ears for him. Then, by way of chaffing him, he asked if he hadn't about him a second-hand mass, not in too bad repair, on which a decent couple might gain something. The little old priest, grumbling out that God would not be pleased to bless his union, finished up by letting him have his mass for five francs. That was a franc saved. He had now just a franc left.

Gervaise, too, was anxious to look her best. As soon as the marriage was decided upon, she pulled herself together, worked on late in the evening, and scraped together thirty francs. She was greatly set on having a little silk mantle, marked at thirteen francs in the Rue du Faubourg-Poissonnière. She bought it, then gave ten francs to the husband of a washerwoman who had died at Madame Fauconnier's for a dress of thick blue woollen stuff, which she altered to fit herself. Out of the seven francs over, she had a pair of cotton gloves, a rose for her bonnet, and shoes for her eldest, Claude. Luckily the children had passable blouses. She spent four nights in cleaning up everything, not overlooking the smallest holes in her chemise and stockings.

Finally, on Friday night, the day before the great day, Gervaise and Coupeau, after returning from their work, had to trudge about till eleven o'clock. Then, before they separated for the night, they spent an hour together in the room of Gervaise, well pleased

to have got things at last into order. Despite their resolution of not bestirring themselves on account of the neighbours, they had taken the thing to heart after all, and regularly tired themselves out. When they said good-night, they were ready to drop with fatigue. But, all the same, they were well satisfied with things as they were. Now everything was arranged. Coupeau had as witnesses M. Madinier and Bibi-la-Grillade; Gervaise counted on Lorilleux and Boche. They were to go quietly to the mayoralty and the church, the six of them, without taking a whole bevy of people along with them. The two sisters of the bridegroom had said that they would remain at home, their presence not being necessary. Only old Madame Coupeau had begun to weep, declaring that she would sooner go beforehand and hide away in a corner; so they had promised to let her come too. The hour of meeting was fixed for everybody at one o'clock, at the "Moulin-d'Argent." Then they were to go and get an appetite in the Plaine Saint-Denis; going by railway, and coming back on foot along the main road. The party promised well, not a regular tuck-in, but a bit of a spree, a nice quiet affair.

Saturday morning, as he was dressing, Coupeau began to feel anxious about his solitary franc. It had just occurred to him that he was bound to offer a bite and a sup to the witnesses before dinner. Then there would very likely be some unlooked-for expenses. It would really never do to have only a franc. So after having taken Claude and Étienne across to Madame Boche, who had promised to bring them on to dinner,

he ran to the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or and went up boldly to borrow ten francs from the Lorilleux. It went very much against the grain, for he anticipated the grimace his brother-in-law would make. And indeed he grumbled, gave a nasty chuckle, but finally produced the two five-franc pieces, while his wife muttered between her teeth that "it was a good beginning."

The marriage was fixed at the mayoralty for half-past ten. It was a splendid morning, the sun pouring down like a furnace, scorching the streets. So as not to attract attention, the bride and bridegroom, the mother, and the two witnesses split into two parties. Gervaise walked in front on the arm of Lorilleux, whilst M. Madinier escorted Madame Coupeau; then, a little way behind, on the other side of the street, came Coupeau, Boche, and Bibi-la-Grillade. They all had black tail-coats; Boche wore yellow trousers, Bibi-la-Grillade, buttoned to the throat, without a waistcoat, displayed only a bit of a knotted tie. M. Madinier alone had a dress-coat, a big coat cut square; and the passers all turned to see the gentleman escorting the fat Madame Coupeau in her green shawl and black bonnet with red ribbons. Gervaise, gay and charming in her dark blue dress and tight-fitting little mantle, listened indulgently to the sneers of Lorilleux, buried in an immense overcoat in spite of the heat; and from time to time, at the corner of the streets, she turned her head a little, and smiled back at Coupeau, ill at ease in his shiny new clothes.

Slowly as they walked, they reached the mayor-

alty a good half-hour before the time; and as the mayor was late their turn did not come till eleven. They sat down and waited in a corner of the room, staring at the high ceiling and the bare walls, and speaking in low voices, drawing back their chairs in their excess of politeness every time that an office-boy went by. Nevertheless they whispered to one another that the mayor was a dawdler; he was sure to be paying a visit to his best girl, for the benefit of his gout; perhaps he had had too much, and swallowed his scarf. But when the magistrate appeared, they rose respectfully. They had to sit down again, and look on at three weddings, weddings of respectable folk, with brides in white, little girls with curled hair, young ladies in pink sashes, interminable *cortéges* of gentlemen and ladies in their best togs, looking quite stylish. Then, when their turn came, the marriage was near not coming off, Bibi-la-Grillade having disappeared. Boche discovered him downstairs in the square, smoking his pipe. Nice sort of people they were too, in this establishment, giving one the go-by, simply because one hadn't brand-new gloves to sport! And the formalities, the reading of the Code, the questions, the signatures, were hurried through so quickly, that they looked at one another in amazement, imagining that they had been cheated out of a good half of the ceremony. Gervaise, agitated and overcome, pressed her handkerchief to her lips. Madame Coupeau wept copiously. All bent over the register, writing their names in great shaky letters, with the exception of the bridegroom, who made his mark, as he could not

write. Each gave twopence to the poor-box, and Coupeau, at a nudge from Gervaise, gave the office-boy five sous in addition, when he brought him the marriage certificate.

It was a good step from the mayoralty to the church. On the way the men had some beer, Madame Coupeau and Gervaise, cassis with water. And they had to make their way through a long street, on which the sun poured straight down, without an inch of shade. The beadle was waiting for them in the empty church; he hurried them towards a little chapel, demanding angrily if they wished to make a mock of religion by coming in so late. A priest came striding up with a surly air, his face pale with hunger, a clerk in a dirty surplice trotting before him. He hurried through the mass, swallowing his Latin words, turning, bowing, spreading out his arms in great haste, with side glances on the married couple and the witnesses. The married couple before the altar, very much embarrassed, not knowing when to kneel, to stand up, or to sit down, waited for the clerk to motion to them. The witnesses, wishing to behave in a dignified manner, stood up all the time; while Madame Coupeau, once more overcome by her tears, wept into the prayer-book she had borrowed from a neighbour. Twelve o'clock had struck, the last mass had been said, the steps of the sacristans sounded out in the church, and there was a noise of chairs being put back into their places. The high altar was evidently being prepared for some fête, for the hammers of upholsterers could be heard nailing up hangings. And in the little dim chapel, in the midst of the

dust raised by the beadle as he swept up the place, the surly-faced priest laid his withered hands rapidly on the bowed heads of Gervaise and Coupeau, seeming to join them in wedlock in the midst of a sort of house-moving, during an absence of God, between two real masses. When the wedding-party had once more signed the register, and found itself out of doors again, it stood there for an instant, struck all of a heap, out of breath with its rapid transit.

"Here we are!" said Coupeau, with an embarrassed laugh.

He wriggled himself about, finding it anything but a lark. Then he added,—

"Well, there's no time wasted. You get there in four steps. It is just like the dentists; one hasn't time to cry oh! they marry you 'without pain.'"

"Yes, yes, fine work," sneered Lorilleux. "You get spliced in five minutes, and it holds all your life. Poor old Cadet-Cassis!"

And the four witnesses slapped the zinc-worker between the shoulders, for all his airs of importance. Meanwhile Gervaise kissed Madame Coupeau, smiling and crying, answering the old woman's broken words,—

"Never fear, I will do my best. If it turns out badly, it will not be my fault. No, indeed; I am too anxious to be happy. Well, it is done now, anyway. It rests with him and me to do our best to get on together."

After that they went straight to the "Moulin-d'Argent." Coupeau had taken his wife's arm; they walked fast, laughing and excited, two hundred yards before the others, without seeing the houses,

or the people, or the vehicles. The deafening noises of the faubourg rang in their ears. When they reached the wine-shop, Coupeau immediately ordered two bottles, and some bread and ham, in the little parlour on the ground floor, just to have a bite. Then, as Boche and Bibi-la-Grillade manifested a hearty appetite, he sent for another bottle and a little cheese. Madame Coupeau was not hungry, she was too overcome to eat. Gervaise, dying of thirst, drained great glasses of water just tinged with wine.

"That's my affair," said Coupeau, going to the bar, where he paid four francs five sous.

By this time it was one o'clock, and the guests were arriving. Madame Fauconnier, a plump, good-looking woman, was the first comer. She had a flowered écrue dress, a pink silk scarf, and a bonnet covered with flowers. Next came Mademoiselle Remanjou, lean and spare in her invariable black dress, which she was supposed never to take off, even when she went to bed; and the Gaudrons, the husband with his huge bulk packed into a brown jacket, which creaked at every movement, the great fat wife, big with child, and shewing up larger than ever in her staring violet skirt. Coupeau explained that they were not to wait for Mes-Bottes; he would join them on the way to Saint-Denis.

"Well, well!" cried Madame Lerat, as she came in, "we shall have a nice downpour. It *is* going to be nice!"

And she called everybody out to the door to see the clouds, black as ink, which rose rapidly to the south

of Paris. Madame Lerat, the eldest of the Coupeaus, was a tall, skinny, mannish-looking woman, who talked through her nose. She looked a fright in her ill-fitting puce dress, which, with its long streamers, made her look like a little lean cur coming out of the water. She brandished her umbrella like a walking stick. When she had kissed Gervaise she went on,—

"You have no idea; one is simply scorched in the street. It is like a flame beating right in your face."

At that everyone declared that they had felt the storm coming on. When they came out of the church Monsieur Madinier had seen how it was going to turn out. Lorilleux told him his corns had kept him awake till three in the morning. Besides, it was bound to come sooner or later; the last three days had been too hot for anything.

"I think we are going to have a pour," said Coupeau at the door, looking anxiously at the sky. "There is only my sister to come, and then we can start at once."

Madame Lorilleux was behind the time. Madame Lerat had looked in for her on the way, but, as she was only then putting on her corset, they had both come to words. And the lanky widow added in her brother's ear,—

"I gave her the slip. She is in a fine temper. You'll see presently."

The wedding-party had to wait a quarter of an hour longer, loitering about the wine-shop, elbowed about by men coming in to drain a glass at the bar. Every few minutes Boche, or Madame Fauconnier, or

Bibi-la-Grillade would leave the others, and go to the edge of the pavement, turning up their faces. Not a drop of rain; the light grew darker, puffs of wind swept the streets, raising little clouds of dust. At the first stroke of thunder Mademoiselle Remanjou crossed herself. All eyes were turned in the direction of the clock over the mirror; it was already twenty to two.

"Look!" cried Coupeau. "It's raining cats and dogs."

A downpour of rain swept the streets, and women ran helter-skelter, holding up their skirts with both hands. And it was in the midst of this deluge that Madame Lorilleux arrived, panting and furious, struggling on the threshold with her umbrella, which refused to shut.

"Did you ever see!" she spluttered. "I got caught in it at the very door. I was half inclined to go back and take off my things again. And I jolly well wish I had. A nice wedding, this is! I told you so, I wanted to put it off to next Saturday. And it's raining now, because you wouldn't listen to me. All right, all right; let it come down!"

Coupeau tried to calm her. But she told him to go about his business. He wouldn't have to pay for her dress if it were spoilt. She had on a black silk dress, in which she could hardly breathe; the bodice was too tight, it dragged at the button-holes, and cut into her shoulders; and the skirt, cut very narrow, squeezed her so tight at the hips that she had to take tiny steps. Nevertheless, the other ladies looked at her with pursed lips, quite overcome by her toilette.

She took no notice of Gervaise, and seated herself by the side of Madame Coupeau. She called over Lorilleux, asked for his handkerchief, and then, going into a corner, carefully wiped one after another the drops of rain that had fallen on her silk dress.

Meanwhile, the downpour had suddenly ceased. It grew darker and darker, almost like night, a livid darkness lit up by great sheets of lightning. Bibi-la-Grillade said jocosely that it was black enough to rain monks and friars. Then the storm burst out with extreme violence. For a good half hour the rain fell in buckets, the thunder rumbled without intermission. The men, standing at the door, gazed out at the grey veil of rain, the swollen gutters, the spray rising from the splash of the puddles. The women all remained in their seats, terrified, covering their faces with their hands. There was no more conversation, and a joke about the thunder, ventured on by Boche—that St. Peter was snoring up above—did not gain a single smile. But when the thunder grew more distant, and at longer intervals, the company began to get impatient, furious against the storm, swearing and shaking their fists at the clouds. A fine, incessant rain fell from the ashen sky.

"It is past two," cried Madame Lorilleux. "We can't stay here all night."

Mademoiselle Remanjou suggested going into the country all the same, even if one had to take shelter in the fosse of the fortifications; but there was a general outcry: the roads would be anything but pleasant, one couldn't even sit down on the grass; then, too, it wasn't over yet, perhaps there would be

another pour. Coupeau, following with his eyes a workman soaked through, who went his way tranquilly under the rain, murmured,—

"If that ass, Mes-Bottes, is waiting for us on the way to Saint-Denis, he certainly won't get a sunstroke."

At that everybody laughed. But the general ill-temper went on increasing. It was really intolerable; one must decide on something. There was not much fun staring at one another like that till dinner-time. Then for a quarter of an hour they racked their brains, while the downpour continued obstinately. Bibi-la-Grillade proposed a game of cards; Boche slyly suggested a nice little game, the game of father-confessor; Madame Gaudron spoke of going to have an onion pie at the Chaussée Clignancourt; Madame Lerat wanted everybody to tell stories; Gaudron was quite comfortable as he was, but thought they might sit up to table at once. At every proposition there was a discussion, a dispute; it was silly, it would send them all to sleep, they would look like a pack of children. Then, when Lorilleux, wanting to say his say, suggested something quite simple, a stroll along the outer boulevards as far as Père-Lachaise, where they could go in and see the tomb of Héloïse and Abélard, if they had the time, Madame Lorilleux, unable to contain herself any longer, exploded. She was simply going about her own business! A nice thing to propose! Perhaps they wanted to make game of her! Did they think she had dressed, and then got wet through, simply to go and stick in a wine-shop! Not a bit of it; she had had quite enough of their wedding, she

preferred her own home. Coupeau and Lorilleux had to bar the way.

"Get out of the way!" she cried, "I tell you I am going!"

At last her husband succeeded in calming her, and Coupeau went up to Gervaise, who sat quietly in her corner, chatting with her mother-in-law and Madame Fauconnier.

"You don't suggest anything," he said, not yet venturing to address her in the second person.

"Oh! anything you like," she replied, with a smile. "I am not hard to please. We can go out or stay here, it's the same thing to me. I am quite comfortable; I don't ask for anything more."

And, indeed, her face shone with a quiet content. She addressed each of the guests in a low, slightly trembling voice, taking everything simply, and not mixing herself up in the disputes. While the storm had been raging, she had sat there with her eyes fixed on the clouds, as if she were looking into the future, seeing distant things, of grave import, in the vivid flashes of lightning.

M. Madinier had not yet made any suggestion. He leant against the bar, his coat-tails spread out with an air of importance, feeling himself the master. He spat deliberately, rolled his eyes, and then remarked,—

"Why shouldn't we go to the picture gallery?"

And he stroked his chin, looking round at the company and blinking his eyes.

"There are curiosities, pictures, heaps of things. It is most instructive. Perhaps you have never been

there. It is a thing one ought to see once, at all events."

The wedding party looked at one another hesitatingly. No, Gervaise had never been there; nor had Madame Fauconnier, nor Boche, nor any of them. Coupeau fancied he had looked in one Sunday, but he was not quite clear about it. There was still, however, some hesitation, until Madame Lorilleux, on whom M. Madinier's consequential air produced a great impression, declared that the proposal was excellent, the very thing. Since it was a day lost, anyway, and they were all dressed, it was just as well to see something instructive. Everyone agreed. Then, as there was still a little rain, they borrowed some umbrellas, old umbrellas left behind by customers, blue, green, and brown, and started for the gallery.

The wedding party turned to the left, and set out for the city by the Faubourg Saint-Denis. Coupeau and Gervaise once more walked ahead, hurrying along, outstripping the others. M. Madinier now escorted Madame Lorilleux, Madame Coupeau having remained behind on account of her legs. Then came Lorilleux and Madame Lerat, Boche and Madame Fauconnier, Bibi-la-Grillade and Mademoiselle Remanjou, the Gaudrons at the end. They were twelve in number. That made a good long string on the pavement.

"Oh! we are not here for nothing, I assure you," explained Madame Lorilleux to M. Madinier. "We don't know where he picked her up, or rather we know only too well; but then it is not for us to speak about it. My husband had to buy the wedding-ring. And this morning, when he was getting up, he had

to lend them ten francs, without which nothing would have come off. A bride who doesn't bring a single relation to the wedding! She is said to have a sister in Paris, who is in the pork-butcher's line. Why wasn't she invited, I wonder?"

She broke off, to point out Gervaise, who limped badly over the descent of the road.

"Look at her! if one may! Oh! the Clop-clop!"

And this epithet, the Clop-clop, went from mouth to mouth. Lorilleux, in his sneering way, said they ought to call her that. But Madame Fauconnier stood up for Gervaise; they had no right to laugh at her, she was as trim as a new penny, and got through a famous amount of work when it was wanted. Madame Lerat, always full of dubious allusions, said her leg was "a lover's pin"; and, she added that lots of men liked that, without explaining herself further.

The party turned out of the Rue Saint-Denis and crossed the boulevard. They had to wait a moment before the crowd of carriages; then they ventured upon the roadway, which was now streaming with mud. It was pouring again, and they had to open their umbrellas; and, with their wretched gamps held over them by the men, the women gathered up their skirts, and picked their way across, one after another, reaching from side to side of the street. Two street urchins yelled out; the passers-by stopped; shop-keepers looked out amused from behind their windows. Among all the swarm of people, against the grey, wet background of the boulevard, the procession of couples came with a violent contrast, Gervaise with her

dark blue dress, Madame Fauconnier in her flowered écrue dress, Boche in his canary-yellow trousers; while the constrained air of people out in their Sunday best gave a fantastic look to Coupeau's shining tail-coat and the square dress-coat of M. Madinier; whilst the fine get-up of Madame Lorilleux, the streamers of Madame Lerat, the rumpled skirts of Mademoiselle Remanjou, made a mixed medley, trailing all the hand-me-downs of poor people's fashions. But it was the men's hats in particular that amused the folk—old hats, long laid away, dimmed with the dirt of cupboards, with conical tops, tall, broad, and pointed, extraordinary brims, curled and flat, too wide and too narrow. And the smiles increased, when, right at the very end, as if to finish up the show, Madame Gaudron, the wool-carder, in her staring violet dress, advanced with her bulging belly borne proudly before her. The wedding-party did not hasten, taking it all good-naturedly, pleased to be stared at, amused with the jokes.

"Hallo! there's the bride!" cried one of the street urchins. "Oh dear! she's swallowed a big pip!"

All the party burst out laughing. Bibi-la-Grillade, looking round, swore that the kid had had a good one that time. The wool-carder laughed the loudest of all, shewing herself off all the more; there was no disgrace in that, quite the contrary; more than one of the ladies who looked askance at her in passing would have been only too glad to change places with her.

They took the Rue Cléry by mistake; then the

Rue du Mail. On the Place des Victoires there was a stoppage. The bride's left shoe-lace had come undone; and as she tied it up at the foot of the statue of Louis XIV., the couples came close up behind her, joking, as they waited, on the bit of ankle that she shewed. At last, after passing through the Rue Croix-des-Petits-Champs, they reached the Louvre.

M. Madinier politely asked leave to lead the way.

It was a large place, they might easily lose themselves; and he knew the best parts, too, because he had often come there with an artist, a very intelligent fellow, who did designs for a large firm of cardboard makers, to put on boxes. The wedding-party wandered into the Assyrian Gallery, where they were somewhat taken aback. It was deucedly cold there; just the thing for a wine-cellar. The couples advanced slowly, their chins in the air, blinking their lids between the stone colossi, the black marble gods, mute in their hieratic rigidity, the monstrous beasts, half-cat and half-woman, with the faces of the dead, noses shrunken and lips swollen. They thought them very ugly, One knew a jolly lot better than that now-a-days how to carve stone. An inscription in Phœnician characters stupefied them. It was not possible, no one could ever have read that scrawl. But M. Madinier, who had already reached the first landing with Madame Lorilleux, shouted out to them,—

"Come along, that's nothing, those objects. What you have to see is up here."

The bareness and severity of the staircase solemnized them. A superb door-keeper, in red

waistcoat and gold-braided livery, who seemed to await them on the landing, redoubled their terror. It was with great respect, walking as softly as they could, that they entered the French Gallery.

Then, without pausing, their eyes dazzled by the gold of the frames, they went through the string of rooms, seeing picture after picture go by, too many of them to be properly seen. They would have to spend an hour before each, if they were to take it in. What a heap of pictures, damn it all! it would never finish. They must have cost a pretty lot. Then, at the very end, M. Madinier stopped them suddenly before the "Raft of the Medusa;" and he explained the subject to them. All stood silent and transfixed. As they moved on, Boche summed up the general feeling: it was ripping.

In the Apollo Gallery it was the floor that specially amazed them, a floor shining like a mirror, in which the legs of the benches were reflected. Mademoiselle Remanjou closed her eyes, for it seemed to her that she was walking on water. They called to Madame Gaudron to plant her feet firmly, on account of her condition. M. Madinier wanted them to look at the gilding and frescoes of the ceiling; but they strained their necks, and made out very little. Then, before entering the Salon Carré, he pointed to a window, saying,—

"That is where Charles IX. fired on the people."

He looked around to see that everybody was following, then he called for a halt in the middle of the Salon Carré. "There are only masterpieces here," he murmured under his breath, as if he were

in church. They all went round the room. Gervaise asked the subject of the "Marriage at Cana;" it was so stupid not to write the names on the frames. Coupeau stopped before "La Gioconda," which seemed to him to resemble one of his aunts. Boche and Bibi-la-Grillade tittered, pointing out the naked women to one another out of the corner of their eye; they were specially impressed by the thighs of the "Antiope." And, at the very end, the Gaudrons, the husband open-mouthed, the wife with her hands folded across her stomach, stood and gaped blankly, before the "Virgin" of Murillo.

When they had gone all round, M. Madinier suggested that they should go round again; it was quite worth the trouble. He was very attentive to Madame Lorilleux, on account of her silk dress; and every time that she asked him a question, he answered gravely, with the greatest confidence. As she was taken with "Titian's Mistress," whose hair seemed to her something like her own, he told her that it was "la belle Ferronnière," a mistress of Henri IV., on whom there had been a play given at the Ambigu.

Then the wedding-party struck into the long gallery containing the Italian and Flemish schools. Pictures, and yet again pictures, saints, men and women with faces that one could not make out, landscapes gone black, beasts turned yellow, a jumble of people and things in glaring colours, which began to give them a headache. M. Madinier no longer talked, he went slowly at the head of the procession, which followed in order, every neck twisted and every

head uplifted. Centuries of art passed before their bewildered ignorance, the fine rigidity of the early Italians, the splendour of the Venetians, the sleek and sunny life of the Dutchmen. But what interested them the most were the copyists, with their easels set up in the midst of the people, painting away undisturbed; and an old lady mounted on a long ladder, washing a pale sky in an immense picture with stone-colour, struck them particularly. Little by little the news had spread that there was a wedding-party at the Louvre; painters came running up with broad grins, curious onlookers planted themselves beforehand on the benches in the way, whilst the attendants bit their lips to keep back the jokes that came into their minds. And the wedding-party, tired out and losing their respect for things, dragged their hob-nailed shoes along, clattering over the sounding floor with the noise of a herd in confusion, let loose in the midst of the bare and composed neatness of the place.

M. Madinier kept silence, in order to lead up to an effect. He went straight to the "Kermesse" of Rubens. He said nothing, but merely indicated the canvas with a knowing wink. The women, after looking closely at the picture, gave little screams and turned away, blushing red. The men held them back, laughing and looking out the dirty details.

"Well, here now!" said Boche, "that's worth the money. Look! there's somebody spewing, and somebody pumping ship! And look at that one! oh, look at that one! Well, they are a nice set here!"

"Come along," said M. Madinier, enchanted

with his success, "there is nothing more to see this way."

The wedding-party went back the way they had come, through the Salon Carré and the Apollo Gallery. Madame Lerat and Mademoiselle Remanjou complained that their legs were giving way under them. But the cardboard-maker wanted to shew Lorilleux the ancient jewels. It was at the side, in a little room which he could find with his eyes shut. Nevertheless, he lost his way, and led them through seven or eight rooms, cold and deserted, containing nothing but glass cases, in which were innumerable quantities of broken pots and hideous little objects. The party was cold, and bored to death. Then, fumbling at a door, they found themselves among the drawings. It was a fresh tramp; the drawings seemed never ending. Room after room with nothing amusing, only bits of paper covered with scribbles, under glass cases and against the walls. M. Madinier had quite lost his head, which, however, he would not admit; and he took them upstairs to the floor above. This time they found themselves in the marine gallery, among the models of instruments and cannons, raised plans, and ships like big toys. After a quarter of an hour's walk they came at last to another staircase. Having reached the bottom they found themselves once more among the drawings. Then, giving it up in despair, they went forward at random, two and two, following M. Madinier, who mopped his brow, quite beside himself, raging against the management, which he accused of having altered the position of the doors. The door-keepers and visitors gazed at the cavalcade

in amazement. In less than twenty minutes it was to be seen in the Salon Carré, in the French Gallery, and beside the cases in which sleep the little gods of the East. Never would they find the way out. Dragging their tired legs after them as best they could, the wedding-party clattered along, leaving Madame Gaudron's big belly far behind.

"Closing time!" cried the loud voices of the door-keepers.

They were very nearly locked in; a door-keeper had to take them in charge and shew them the way to one of the doors. Once in the courtyard of the Louvre, the umbrellas recovered from the cloak-room, they breathed again. M. Madinier recovered his self-possession; he had made a mistake in not turning to the left; he remembered now that the jewels were to the left. And all the party affected to be very much pleased to have seen it all.

Four o'clock was striking. There were still two hours before dinner-time. They decided on a little walk, in order to kill time. The women, who were very tired, would have preferred to sit down; but as no one offered any refreshments, they set forth once more along the quay. There they were caught in another shower, so heavy, that, despite the umbrellas, the dresses got quite in a mess. Madame Lorilleux, her heart sinking at every drop that fell on her dress, proposed that they should take refuge under the Pont-Royal; indeed, if they would not accompany her, she threatened to go down by herself. They all went down under the Pont-Royal. There it was all right. Wasn't that really a stunning idea! The

women spread out their handkerchiefs on the stones, and sat down, their knees wide apart, plucking with both hands the blades of grass that grew between the stones, gazing at the dark water as it flowed by, as if they were in the country. The men amused themselves with shouting loudly, so as to arouse the echo of the arch opposite; Boche and Bibi-la-Grillade, one after the other insulted vacancy by howling "Cochon!" and roared with laughter as the echo flung back the word in their faces; then, getting hoarse, they picked up flat stones, and played at ducks and drakes. The shower was over, but they were all so comfortable that they felt no inclination to move on. The Seine drifted past them greasily, bearing along with it old corks, parings of vegetables, a heap of filth that whirled round for an instant in the gloomy water under the heavy shadow of the arch; whilst on the bridge above them there was a rumbling of omnibuses and cabs, the mob of Paris, of which they could only see the roofs to the right and left, as from the bottom of a pit. Mademoiselle Remanjou sighed; if there had only been any trees, she said, it would have recalled a little corner of the Marne, where she went in 1817, with a young man whose loss she still mourned.

However, M. Madinier gave the signal to move on. They crossed the garden of the Tuileries, through a whole throng of children, whose hoops and balls disturbed the regular order of the couples. Then, as they reached the Place Vendôme, and stopped to look at the column, M. Madinier proposed to the ladies that they should go up and see

the view of Paris. The idea seemed a capital one. Yes, yes, they must go up; it would be a great joke. Besides, it was very interesting for those who had never left the plain soil.

"You don't fancy the Clop-clop will risk her precious pins in that staircase!" muttered Madame Lorilleux.

"I don't mind going up," said Madame Lerat, "but I don't care about having a man just behind me."

The party began the ascent. The twelve mounted, one after another, in the narrow spiral of the staircase, stumbling against the worn steps, holding on to the walls. Then, when they plunged into utter darkness, there was a roar of laughter. The women uttered little shrieks; the men tickled them and pinched their legs. But it wasn't worth while saying anything; it was better to pretend that it was the mice. Besides, they knew when to stop, they wouldn't go too far. Then Boche hit on a joke which everybody caught up. They called out to Madame Gaudron, as if she had stuck on the way, asking if she could pull herself through. Only fancy! if her time were to come where she was, without being able to get either up or down, she would block up the way, and no one would be able to get past her. And they laughed over the big-bellied woman with shouts of laughter that seemed to shake the column. Then Boche, now set going, declared that they would grow old in this blessed flue; was it never coming to an end? were they going right up to heaven? Meanwhile Coupeau said nothing; he came after Gervaise, his arms around her, feeling her abandon herself to him; and when

they suddenly came into the full light he was in the act of imprinting a kiss on her neck.

"Well! that's all right; pray don't disturb yourselves, you two!" said Madame Lorilleux, with a scandalised air.

Bibi-la-Grillade was furious. He muttered between his teeth,—

"What a noise they make! I couldn't even count the stairs."

M. Madinier, on the leads, was already pointing out the monuments. Madame Fauconnier and Mademoiselle Remanjou could never go farther than the staircase; the mere thought of the pavement down below turned their heads; they would do no more than venture a few glances through the open door. Madame Lerat, more daring, walked all round the narrow space, keeping close against the bronze of the dome. But it was all the same pretty stiff, when you remembered that you only need slip your foot. Good God! what a tumble! The men, rather pale, looked down at the square below. One seemed to be in mid air, away from everything. It positively made one's blood run cold. Meanwhile, M. Madinier advised them to look up, and in front of them, as far as they could; that took the giddiness off. And he went on pointing out the Invalides, the Panthéon, Notre-Dame, the Tour Saint-Jacques, the Buttes Montmartre. Then Madame Lorilleux asked if one could see the wine-shop where they were going to dine, the "Moulin-d'Argent," on the Boulevard de la Chapelle. For ten minutes they looked for it and disputed over it; each placed it in a different spot.

Paris all around them stretched out in its grey immensity, with its blue distances, its deep valleys, with their rolling waves of roofs; on the right of the Seine, all lay in shadow, beneath a great sheet of copper-coloured cloud; and from the edge of this cloud, with its fringe of gold, a great ray of sunlight shot out, lighting up thousands of window-panes, to the left of the river, with sparkling flashes, blocking out this corner of the city in a flood of light against the clear sky, swept clear by the storm.

"It wasn't worth while coming up here to fly at one another's throats," said Boche, angrily, making his way downstairs.

The wedding party descended in gloomy silence, without a sound save the clatter of their shoes on the stairs. When they reached the bottom M. Madinier offered to pay, but Coupeau would not hear of it, and thrust twenty-five sous into the attendant's hand, two sous each. It was nearly half-past five, that gave them just the time to get back. They went back along the boulevards and by way of the Faubourg Poissonnière. Coupeau, however, declared that the outing could not be allowed to end like that, and he hurried everybody into a wine-shop, where they took vermouth.

Dinner had been ordered for six. The party had been due at the "Moulin-d'Argent" for the last twenty minutes. Madame Boche, who had left her *concierge's* lodge in the care of someone in the house, was chatting with old Madame Coupeau on the first-floor dining-room, opposite the spread table; and the two children, Claude and Étienne, whom she had

brought along, amused themselves by running under the table in the midst of a medley of chairs. When Gervaise saw the children, whom she had not seen all day, she lifted them on her knees, and began to kiss and fondle them.

"Have they behaved themselves?" she asked Madame Boche. "They haven't given you too much bother, I hope?"

And as Madame Boche related the droll things the little rascals had said during the afternoon, she caught them up again, and clasped them to her in a very passion of tenderness.

"It is rather funny for Coupeau, all the same," said Madame Lorilleux to the other women at the far end of the room.

Gervaise still kept the quietly-smiling air she had had in the morning. Since the outing, however, she became pensive from time to time, considering her husband and the Lorilleux in her thoughtful way. Coupeau seemed to her afraid of his sister. The night before, he had sworn that he would soon put them in their places with their backbiting tongues, if need were. But, once before them, she saw well, he crouched like a beaten cur, waited on all their words, and was on pins and needles when he thought they were put out. And all that disturbed her a little for the future.

Meanwhile there was only Mes-Bottes to wait for.

"Oh! hang it all!" said Coupeau, "let's sit down to table. You'll soon see him crop up; he has a sharp nose, he can sniff the grub a long way off.

I say, he's having a jolly time if he has been cooling his heels all this while on the road to Saint-Denis!"

Thereupon the wedding-party, much diverted, drew up to table with a great scraping of chairs. Gervaise was between Lorilleux and M. Madinier, and Coupeau between Madame Fauconnier and Madame Lorilleux. The other guests seated themselves where they pleased, because there were always grumblings and jealousies when the places were arranged beforehand. Boche slipped into the seat by Madame Lerat. Bibi-la-Grillade had for neighbours Mademoiselle Remanjou and Madame Gaudron. As for Madame Boche and old Madame Coupeau, right at the end, they looked after the children, and promised to cut up their meat, and give them something to drink; above all, not much wine.

"Doesn't anyone say grace?" asked Boche, whilst the ladies were arranging their skirts under the table, for fear of staining them.

But Madame Lorilleux did not approve of such jokes. The vermicelli soup, almost cold, was eaten very quickly, with a hissing noise of lips in the spoons. Two waiters were in attendance, dressed in little greasy jackets and aprons of dubious whiteness. Through the four windows, opening on the acacias of the court, the air entered freely, a calm evening after storm, still with a lingering heat. The reflection of the dripping trees cast a greenish light over the smoky room, making the shadows of the leaves flicker over the table-cloth, smelling faintly of mouldiness. There were two fly-spotted mirrors, one

at each end, seeming to lengthen out the table indefinitely, with its dingy plate turning yellow, the grease of the sink clotted black in the scratches of the knives. Every time that a waiter came up from the kitchen, a door at the end banged, letting through a strong smell of burning fat.

"Now don't speak all at once," said Boche, in the midst of a general silence, as they bent over their plates.

The first glass of wine was being drunk, and two force-meat pies were being served by the waiters, when Mes-Bottes entered.

"Well! you are a nice lot, you people!" he cried. "Here have I been kicking my heels on the road these three hours, till a gendarme actually came and asked for my papers. Is that the dirty way you serve your friends? You might at least have sent a coach for me. No kid, you know, you come it rather too strong. Why it rained so hard my pockets were filled with water; you might fish in them now."

The company went into fits of laughter. Mes-Bottes was quite screwed; he had already had his two bottles, merely as a sort of counter-blast to the dose of Adam's ale which the storm had soused him with.

"Now, daddy long-legs!" said Coupeau, "go and sit down at the end by Madame Gaudron. You see, we waited for you!"

Oh, that was all the same to him, he would soon catch them up; and he called three times for soup, platesful of vermicelli, in which he cut up huge junks of bread. When they attacked the pies, he became the wonderment of the whole table. How he did

guzzle! The astonished waiters took turns in passing him the bread, little neat bits which he swallowed at one mouthful. At last he lost his temper, and demanded a whole length of bread to himself. The landlord looked in anxiously for a moment at the door, and the company, who were expecting his advent, went into fresh fits of laughter. And that fetched him, the poor old boss! And wasn't he a stunner, Mes-Bottes! One day he had eaten twelve hard-boiled eggs and drunk twelve glasses of wine, while it was striking twelve! There were not many like that! And Mademoiselle Remanjou, quite moved by his prowess, watched his jaws going, whilst M. Madinier, casting about for a word to express his astonishment, which amounted almost to respect, declared that such a capacity was extraordinary.

There was a silence. A waiter had just placed on the table a ragout of rabbit in a huge dish as deep as a salad-bowl. Thereupon Coupeau played off a famous bit of spoof.

"I say, waiter, you've brought us a nice sort of rabbit. I should call it a gutter-rabbit. Why, it still mews."

And, indeed, a faint mew, perfectly imitated, seemed to issue from the plate. It was Coupeau who did it in his throat, without moving his lips; a show accomplishment which never failed of success, so that he never ordered a meal without including rabbit. After that he purred. The women hid their faces in their handkerchiefs; they could not stop laughing.

Madame Fauconnier asked for the head; she

only cared for the head. Mademoiselle Remanjou adored the fat. And when Boche said that he preferred the little onions when they were well done, Madame Lerat pursed up her lips and muttered,—

"I can quite understand that."

She was as thin as a lath, lived a hard-working, cloisteral existence, and had scarcely seen a man since her husband died, but she had a perfect mania for indecent allusions, so very obscure that only she herself could understand them. Boche bent over and asked her in a whisper to explain her meaning, but she only repeated,—

"Oh, yes, the little onions. I fancy that will just do."

But the conversation became serious. Everyone talked shop. M. Madinier bragged about his cardboard making; there were genuine artists employed in it; and he referred to the fancy boxes, of which he knew the models, perfect wonders. Meanwhile Lorilleux sneered; he was very proud of working in gold, he seemed to see the glitter of it on his fingers, from head to foot. "Well," said he, "goldsmiths once upon a time used to wear swords," and he referred at random to Bernard Palissy. Coupeau told of a weathercock that one of his fellow-workmen had made; it was composed of a column, then of a sheaf, then of a basket of fruit, then of a flag, all copied to the life, and made merely out of bits of zinc cut out and soldered together. Madame Lerat explained to Bibi-la-Grillade how the stalk of a rose was turned, making the handle of her knife revolve between her bony fingers. Meanwhile voices grew

louder, and spoke all at once. In the midst of the noise Madame Fauconnier was heard complaining of one of her work-girls, a bit of trash, who had caught fire to a pair of her sheets only last night.

"You may say as you like," cried Lorilleux, bringing down his fist on the table, "gold is gold."

And, in the silence caused by this truism, nothing was heard but the thin voice of Mademoiselle Remanjou continuing,—

"Then I pull up the petticoat, I sew underneath, I stick a pin into the head to keep on the bonnet, and it is finished. They are sold at sixpence."

She was explaining her dolls to Mes-Bottes, whose jaws worked on slowly and steadily, like mill-stones. He paid no attention, but wagged his head, and kept an eye on the waiters, so that they should not change the plates before they were well scraped out. They had had a *fricandeau au jus* and French beans. Now the roast was brought in, two meagre fowls laid out on cress, faded and frizzled by the heat. Outside, the sun was fading behind the high branches of the acacias. In the room, the greenish reflection grew darker in the steam that rose from the table, stained with wine and sauce, and encumbered with all the dishes. And along the wall, the dirty plates and empty bottles, placed there by the waiters, seemed the sweepings of the feast. It was very hot. The men took off their coats, and went on eating in their shirt-sleeves.

"Madame Boche, please don't let the children stuff so much," said Gervaise, who had spoken little, keeping an eye on Claude and Étienne from a distance.

She got up, and went round behind their chairs to speak to them for a moment. The children, you may be sure, would eat all day long without refusing anything; and she gave them herself some fowl, a bit of the white. But old Madame Coupeau declared that they might have an indigestion if they would, for once. Madame Boche, in a low voice, accused Boche of pinching Madame Lerat's knee. He was a sly dog; he was easily worked up. She saw his hand go out of sight. If he did it again she had a good mind to fling a decanter at his head; she had indeed.

In the midst of the general silence M. Madinier talked politics.

"Their law of the 31rst of May is an abomination. Now you are obliged to have been a householder for two years. Three thousand citizens are struck off the lists. They say that Bonaparte is really at heart much put out about it, for he loves the people, he has shewn it."

For his part he was a Republican, but he admired the prince on account of his uncle, a man the like of whom would never be seen again. Bibi-la-Grillade grew wroth. He had worked at the Élysée; he had seen Bonaparte as well as he saw Mes-Bottes there opposite to him. Well, as for the president, the bounder looked for all the world like a peeler! It was reported that he was going on a tour Lyons way: it would be a good riddance if he were to break his neck over a ditch. And as the discussion grew heated, Coupeau had to interfere.

"Well, you are flats to quarrel over politics! There's a nice business, politics! What have we to

do with politics, I should like to know? They can have what they like, a king, an emperor, or nothing, but will that hinder me from earning my five francs, from eating and sleeping, eh? It's too ridiculous!"

Lorilleux shook his head. He was born the same day as the Comte de Chambord, the 29th of September, 1820. This coincidence impressed him deeply; and he had vague dreams, in which there was a certain connection between the return of the king and his own luck. He did not say exactly what he hoped for, but he gave out that it would be something uncommonly pleasant. So, whenever he hoped for anything that was not likely to be realized, he put it off till later, "when the king comes back."

"Besides," he went on, "I saw the Comte de Chambord one day . . . ."

Every face turned in his direction.

"Certainly. A big good-natured looking man in a greatcoat. I was at Péquignot's, a friend of mine who sells furniture, Grande-Rue de la Chapelle. The Comte de Chambord had left his umbrella there the day before. Well, he came in, he said, 'Would you kindly give me my umbrella?' just like that, quite simply. Fact! it was he himself, Péquignot gave me his word."

None of the guests threw any doubt on the story. By this time they had come to the dessert. The waiters cleared the table with a great clatter of dishes. And Madame Lorilleux, who till then had behaved in the most genteel and ladylike manner, screamed out "Damn your butter fingers!" as one of the waiters, in removing a dish, dropped some-

thing wet on the back of her neck. Her silk dress must surely be stained. M. Madinier had to look up and down her back, but he swore there was nothing to be seen. Meanwhile some *œufs à la neige* were laid out in a salad bowl in the middle of the table, with two plates of cheese on one side and two plates of fruit on the other. The *œufs à la neige*, the over-done white crumbling into the yellow cream, caused quite a sensation; they were something unexpected, quite stylish. Mes-Bottes continued to eat. He had asked for another roll of bread. He finished up both sorts of cheese; then, finding some cream left, he had the salad bowl passed to him, and proceeded to ladle out huge pieces, as if it were soup.

"The gentleman is really very remarkable," said M. Madinier, once more lost in admiration.

Then the men rose to fill their pipes. They stopped for a moment behind Mes-Bottes, slapping him on the shoulder, and asking him if he felt better now. Bibi-la-Grillade lifted him, chair and all; but the blasted creature was twice as heavy as he was before. Coupeau declared jokingly that he was only just getting under weigh; that he would go on eating bread at that rate all night. The terrified waiters disappeared. Boche, who had gone downstairs just before, came up declaring that the landlord was sitting pallid inside the bar, while his wife, all in a flurry, had sent out to see if the bakers were still open; the very cat went about looking the picture of misery. It was really too absurd; it was worth the price of the dinner; it was impossible to have a proper feed without that great guzzler Mes-Bottes.

And the men, as they smoked their pipes, looked at him enviously; for a man must be solidly built to be able to eat all that.

"I shouldn't like to have to look after your keep," said Madame Gaudron. "No, indeed!"

"I say, mother, none of that," replied Mes-Bottes, with a side-glance at the big belly of his neighbour. "You've swallowed more than I have."

Everyone applauded, and cried "Bravo!" It was a good hit. The light had now quite gone, and three gas-burners flickered in the room, giving a wavering light in the midst of the smoke of pipes. The waiters, after having served the coffee and cognac, had cleared away the last piles of dirty plates. Below, under the three acacias, the dancing had begun, a cornet-à-pistons and two violins playing loudly, the women's laughter sounding shrill in the warm night.

"Now for a good stiff drink!" cried Mes-Bottes. "Two bottles of rare old stuff, plenty of lemons, and not too much sugar!"

But Coupeau, seeing Gervaise look anxious, got up and declared that there was to be no more drink served. They had disposed of five-and-twenty bottles, each his bottle and a-half, counting the children; that was quite enough. They had had a mouthful together in a friendly way, without making any great to-do, because they were all good friends, and wished to celebrate a family-rejoicing together. All had gone off merrily and well; it wouldn't do now to go and get beastly tight if they had any respect for the ladies. In a word, and this was the last he should say, they had met together to drink to their splicing, and

not to get half-seas over. This little speech, delivered in a determined voice by the zinc-worker, who laid his hand on his heart at the close of each phrase, was received with warm approbation by Lorilleux and M. Madinier. But the others, Boche, Gaudron, Bibi-la-Grillard, Mes-Bottes in particular, all four very screwed, merely sneered, declaring they felt damned inclined to wet their whistle.

"Those who are thirsty are thirsty, and those who are not thirsty are not thirsty," observed Mes-Bottes, "consequently we are going to have our drink. We don't prig nothing from nobody. Swells can have sugar and water if they like."

And as the zinc-worker was beginning to speak again, the other, who had got up, smacked his thigh, exclaiming,—

"You be hanged! Waiter! two bottles of old."

At that Coupeau said that it was all very well, only they had better settle up the amount of the meal at once, and so have things clear. There was no reason why decent folk should pay for boozers. And it turned out that Mes-Bottes, after great fumbling, could only find three francs seven sous. Why had they left him in the lurch on the road to Saint-Denis? He couldn't stay there and be drowned, so he had split his five-franc piece; it was their own fault. Finally, he handed over three francs, keeping the seven sous for his next day's tobacco. Coupeau was furious, and would have kicked at it, had not Gervaise pulled him by the sleeve, frightened and supplicating. He decided to borrow two francs from Lorilleux, who, after having refused, slipped them

into his hand, for his wife would certainly never have allowed it.

Meanwhile, M. Madinier had taken a plate. The unaccompanied ladies, Madame Lerat, Madame Fauconnier, Mademoiselle Remanjou, put down their five franc-piece first, discreetly. Then the men went to the other end of the room, and went over the accounts. They were fifteen; that should be seventy-five francs. When the seventy-five francs were in the plate, every man added five sous for the waiters. It took a quarter of an hour's hard work before it was all settled to everyone's satisfaction.

But when M. Madinier, who wished to settle up with the landlord, had sent to summon him, the whole company was struck with amazement on hearing him declare with a smile that that was not all. There were certain extras. And as this word of "extras" was received with frantic exclamations, he gave the details: twenty-five bottles instead of twenty, the number agreed upon beforehand; the *œufs à la niege*, which he had added, he said, on seeing the dessert rather meagre; finally, a carafon of rum, served with the coffee, in case anyone preferred rum. Then a formidable battle began. Coupeau, brought to bay, held out firmly; he had never said a word about twenty bottles; as for the *œufs à la neige*, they were a part of the dessert, so much the worse for him if he had added them on his own hook; as for the carafon of rum, that was a mere trick, done to swell out the bill by putting liqueurs on the table which one helped oneself to without noticing.

"It was on the tray with the coffee," he cried; "well, it ought to be included with the coffee. Just clear off, take your money along with you, and be damned to you if we ever set foot in this hole again!"

"It is six francs extra," repeated the landlord. "Give me my six francs. And I don't include that gentleman's three breads either!"

The whole party crowded round him, buffetting him with a very fury of gesticulation, a scream of voices half strangled with rage. The women especially, coming out of their reserve, refused to add a cent. A nice sort of wedding this was, indeed! It was not Mademoiselle Remanjou who would ever poke herself into one of those dinners again! Madame Fauconnier had had an extremely bad dinner; at home, for forty sous, she could have had quite a tasty little meal. Madame Gaudron complained bitterly of having been shoved away at the far end of the table by the side of Mes-Bottes, who had not paid the slightest attention to her. These arrangements always turned out badly. When one wanted people to come to a wedding dinner—Heavens!—they might be decently invited! And Gervaise, seeking refuge beside old Madame Coupeau by one of the windows, said nothing, feeling horribly ashamed, as if all these outcries were directed against herself.

M. Madinier finally went downstairs with the landlord. They could be heard discussing the matter. In half an hour's time the cardboard-maker reappeared; he had settled the account by paying three francs. But the company was still vexed and exasperated,

going back again and again to the question of extras. And the confusion was increased by a vigorous act of Madame Boche. She kept an eye constantly on Boche, and spied him, in a corner, putting his arm round the waist of Madame Lerat. Thereupon she flung a decanter at his head, smashing it in pieces against the wall.

"It is evident that your husband is a tailor, madame," said the tall widow, with her much-meaning purse of the lips. "He is an A1 for the petticoats. I kept kicking him under the table, all the same."

The harmony of the evening was spoilt; a note of bitterness crept in. M. Madinier proposed some singing, but Bibi-la-Grillade, who had a good voice, was nowhere to be found; at last Mademoiselle Remanjou saw him from the window, whirling round a fat, bare-headed girl under the acacias. The cornet-à-piston and the two violins played "*Le Marchand de Moutarde*," a quadrille, in which one clapped hands, *à la pastourelle*. Thereupon there was a rush; Mes-Bottes and the Gaudrons went down, Boche himself followed. From the windows, the couples could be seen turning, between the leaves, to which the coloured lanterns, suspended from the branches, gave the crude, painted green of stage scenery. The night was still and breathless after the great heat. Upstairs, a serious conversation had arisen between Lorilleux and M. Madinier, whilst the ladies, unable to give vent to their rage, examined their dresses, to see if they had got in a mess.

Madame Lerat's streamers appeared to have

been dipped into the coffee. Madame Fauconnier's écrue dress was covered with sauce. Old Madame Coupeau's green shawl, which had fallen off the back of a chair, had just been discovered in a corner, crumpled and stepped upon. But it was Madame Lorilleux in particular who worked herself up into a fury. Her dress was spotted at the back. Everybody might swear to the contrary, but she could feel it. And after wriggling about before the glass, she finally discovered the stain.

"What did I say?" she cried. "It is gravy off the fowl. The waiter shall pay for my dress; I will summons him. That is the finishing touch! I had better have stayed in bed all day. I shall go directly; I have had quite enough of their blessed wedding!"

She set off in a fury, making the staircase tremble under her. Lorilleux ran after her, but all he could do was to induce her to wait five minutes on the pavement, in case they would all start together. She would have done better to have gone right back after the storm, as she had wished to do. She would serve out Coupeau for that day! When Coupeau heard the state she was in, he seemed quite overcome; and Gervaise, to smooth the way for him, agreed to come home at once. Thereupon the women hastily kissed one another. M. Madinier undertook to see old Madame Coupeau home. Madame Boche was going to take Claude and Étienne home with her for the first night; their mother need have no fear, the little ones were already asleep on chairs, stupefied with an indigestion of *œufs à la neige*. At last the bride and bridegroom made their escape with Lorilleux, leaving

the rest of the party at the wine-shop, where a squabble had arisen in the dancing hall between their set and another; Boche and Mes-Bottes, who had embraced a certain lady, being unwilling to give her back to two soldiers whom she was with, threatening to knock over the whole apple-cart, while the cornet-à-piston and the two violins went on beating out the polka of the *Perles*.

It was not yet quite eleven. On the Boulevard de la Chapelle and all around the Goutte-d'Or, the fortnight's pay-day, which fell on that Saturday, brought out a noisy swarm of tipplers. Madame Lorilleux waited twenty yards away from the "Moulin-d'Argent," motionless under the gas-lamp. She took Lorilleux's arm, and marched ahead without turning, at such a rate that Gervaise and Coupeau got quite out of breath in trying to keep up with them. Sometimes they had to move off the footpath in order to get past a drunkard who had fallen there, and lay sprawling on his back. Lorilleux turned his head, trying to patch up the peace.

"We will see you to your door," he said.

But Madame Lorilleux, raising her voice, said it seemed to her odd to pass one's wedding-night in such a beastly hole as the Hôtel Boncœur. Wouldn't they have done better to put off the marriage, save a few pence, and buy some furniture, so as to be in their own home for the first night? Very comfortable they would be up under the roof, packed away in a ten-franc room, where there was not room to breathe.

"I have given notice, we shan't stay up there,"

objected Coupeau, timidly. "We shall keep Gervaise's room; it is larger."

At that Madame Lorilleux forgot herself, and turned round sharply.

"That is too much!" she cried, "to sleep in the Clop-clop's room!"

Gervaise turned quite pale. The nickname, which she heard flung in her face for the first time, struck her like a blow. Then, too, she quite understood the meaning of her sister-in-law's exclamation: the Clop-clop's room, that meant the room where she had lived a month with Lantier, where there was still the trail of her past life. Coupeau saw nothing of it, was only wounded by the nickname.

"You make a mistake in calling other people names," he replied, angrily. "You don't know that they call you Pigtail all about here, because of your hair. There, you don't much care about that, do you? Why shouldn't we keep the room on the first floor? The children are not sleeping there to-night, we shall be all right."

Madame Lorilleux made no reply; she was on her dignity, for she had been horribly vexed at being called Pigtail. Coupeau, to console Gervaise, squeezed her arm in his, and he succeeded even in making her smile as he whispered in her ear that they were setting up house on the sum of seven sous all told, three big sous and one little sou, which he jingled in his trousers pocket. When they reached the Hôtel Boncœur, they said good night in a constrained manner. And as Coupeau thrust the two women into one another's arms, calling them two sillies, a drunkard, who

seemed to be going to pass on the right, gave a sudden stagger to the left, and came just between them.

"Hallo! it's old Bazouge!" said Lorilleux. "He's on his beam-ends to-night."

Gervaise, in a fright, retreated against the door of the Hôtel Boncœur. Old Bazouge, an undertaker's man of about fifty, had stained his black trousers with mud, his black cloak was slipping off his shoulders, his black hat squashed and battered by a fall.

"Don't be frightened, he's all right," continued Lorilleux. "He is a neighbour of ours, the third room in the corridor, before you get to us. It would look nice if his employers saw him like that."

Meanwhile old Bazouge had taken offence at the young woman's fright.

"Well, well!" he stuttered out, "we ain't going to eat nobody. I'm as good as anyone else, eh! my dear? Of course, I have had a glass. When you've got plenty of work you must grease the wheels. It isn't you nor the others who would have brought down the party of forty stone that we had to bring down between us from the fourth story to the ground, and without letting him drop. I like jolly folk."

But Gervaise drew back closer into the angle of the door, ready to burst into tears, feeling as if all her day's happiness were spoilt. She forgot all about embracing her sister-in-law, she only begged Coupeau to send away the drunken man. Thereupon Bazouge, staggering, made a gesture of philosophic disdain.

"Your turn will come one day, my dear, all the

same. Perhaps you'll be only too glad for your turn to come, one day. Yes, I know women who would say thank you if one came to fetch them."

And as the Lorilleux made up their minds to take him along with them, he turned, stuttering out a last word between two hiccups.

"When you're dead . . . . look you here . . . . when you're dead, you're dead for a long time."

CHAPTER IV

THEN came four years of hard work. In the neighbourhood Gervaise and Coupeau had a good reputation; they kept themselves to themselves, had no squabbles, and went out regularly for a walk on Sundays, Saint-Ouen way. The wife worked twelve hours a day at Madame Fauconnier's, and managed to keep everything at home as bright as a new penny, and to have something to eat for her people morning and evening. The husband lived soberly, brought home his fortnight's wages, and smoked his pipe at the window before going to bed, by way of taking a breath of air. They were held up for their good behaviour. And as they earned between them nearly nine francs a day, it was thought that they must be putting aside a tidy lot of money.

But, especially to begin with, they had to work with all their might to make both ends meet. Their marriage had involved them in a debt of two hundred francs. Then they were very much discontented with the Hôtel Boncœur; it seemed to them horrible, with its dirty people coming and going; and they longed to have a house of their own, where they could have their own furniture, and look after it themselves.

Twenty times over, they reckoned up how much it would cost; in round figures, it came to three hundred and fifty francs, if they were to have things comfortable at once, and be able to lay their hands on a saucepan or a frying-pan when they wanted it. They were in despair of being able to save such a large sum in less than two years, when a stroke of luck befell them: an old gentleman of Plassans offered to put Claude, the eldest of the children, to school there; the generous whim of an eccentric character, a great lover of pictures, who had been greatly struck by some little daubs that the child had done. Claude was already a heavy drag upon them. With only the younger, Étienne, they got together the three hundred and fifty francs in seven months and a half. The day when they bought their furniture at a second-hand shop in the Rue Belhomme, they were in such a state of delight that they had to take a little walk along the outer boulevards before going home. There was a bed, a night-table, a marble-topped chest of drawers, a cupboard, a round table covered with oilcloth, six chairs, all in old mahogany; besides bedclothes, linen, and kitchen utensils, almost new. It was for them a serious and considerable step in life, something which gave them, as householders, a certain importance among the poorer people of the neighbourhood.

For the past two months they had been looking out for a place to live in. They tried first of all to rent a room in the big house of the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. But there was not a single room free, and they had to give up their old idea. To tell the truth, Gervaise was not sorry at bottom; the neighbourhood of the

Lorilleux at such close quarters quite frightened her. Thereupon they looked elsewhere. Coupeau very properly wished not to be far from Madame Fauconnier's, so that Gervaise could be at home in one step, any hour of the day. And they made quite a find, a large room with a small room attached, and a kitchen, Rue Neuve de la Goutte-d'Or, almost opposite to the laundry. It was a little one-story house with a narrow staircase, at the top of which there were only two sets of rooms, one on the right hand, the other on the left; the lower part was taken up by a man who let out carriages, whose stock filled the sheds in the great court-yard level with the street. Gervaise was delighted; she seemed to be in the country again; no neighbours, no uproars to dread, a little quiet corner which reminded her of a Plassans alley near the ramparts, and to put the finishing touch to their luck she could see her window from the ironing board by merely stretching forward her head.

The house-moving took place in the April term. Gervaise was then eight months gone with child. But she kept up a good show of courage, saying with a laugh that the child helped her while she was working; she felt its little fists move within her, giving her strength to labour. She gave Coupeau a pretty warm reception when he suggested that she should take to bed, and look after herself a bit. She would do that when the pains took her; it would be quite time enough, and now, with another mouth to feed, they would have to stick at it harder than ever. And she cleaned out the new rooms herself, before helping her husband to put the furniture in its

place. She simply worshipped this furniture of hers, wiping it all down with a sort of maternal care, seized with dismay at the slightest scratch. She drew back in fright, as if she had knocked herself, when her broom came against it in sweeping up. The chest of drawers was specially dear to her, it seemed to her so fine and solid and respectable-looking. It was a dream of hers, of which she had dared not speak, to have an ornamental clock which she could put in the centre of the marble-top, where it would have a superb effect. But for the baby she was expecting, she would perhaps have run the risk of buying it. However, she put it off for the future, with a sigh.

They lived in a state of enchantment over their new dwelling. Étienne's bed occupied the little room, where there was also space for another child's cot. The kitchen was a mere hand's breadth, and as dark as pitch; but by leaving the door open, one could see all right; besides, Gervaise had not got to cook for twenty people, she only wanted somewhere to put her *pot-au-feu*. As for the large room, it was their great pride. In the morning they drew the curtains of the alcove, white calico curtains; and at once the room was transformed into a dining-room, with the table in the middle, the cupboard and the chest of drawers, one at each end. As the chimney used up fifteen sous' worth of coal a day, they stopped it up; a little iron stove on the hearth gave them warmth enough during the cold weather for seven sous. Then Coupeau did his best to ornament the walls, hoping for better things by and by; a large engraving representing a marshal of France,

prancing on horseback, baton in hand, between a cannon and a heap of cannon balls, took the place of a mirror; over the chest of drawers some family photographs were arranged in two rows, to right and left of an old holy-water basin of gilt china, in which they kept matches; on the top of the cupboard a bust of Pascal stood side by side with a bust of Béranger, the one grave, the other smiling, near the tall clock, to whose ticking they seemed to be listening. It was really a beautiful room.

"Guess how much we pay here?" Gervaise would ask each visitor.

And when they guessed too much she was quite triumphant, and she would cry in an ecstacy at being so well off for so little money,—

"A hundred and fifty francs, not a penny more! It is like getting it for nothing!"

The Rue Neuve de la Goutte-d'Or had itself not a little to do with their satisfaction. Gervaise spent her whole time in it, going to and fro constantly between her own house and Madame Fauconnier's. Coupeau now went down in the evening, and smoked his pipe on the doorstep. The street was a steep incline, it had no footpath, and the road was very irregular. At the top, in the direction of the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, there were gloomy shops, with dusty windows, shoemakers', coopers', a grocer's, very dingy, and a wine-shop, which had gone bankrupt, and had been shut up for some weeks, the shutters all covered with announcements. At the other end, city-wards, four-story houses blocked the sky, their ground floors occupied by laundries, a whole crowd of them all

together; only a single provincial hair-dresser's shop, painted green, full of delicate-coloured bottles, lightened up the dark corner with the glitter of its brass sign, always brightly burnished. But the bright part of the street was in the middle, at the point where the buildings, lower and fewer in number, left a space for the sun and air. The carriage-sheds, the neighbouring Eau de Seltz manufactory, the wash-house opposite, left free a large and silent space, in which the stifled voices of the washerwomen and the regular respiration of the steam-boiler seemed to heighten the quietness of the place. Large open spaces, and little lanes leading up between dark walls, gave it the air of a village. And Coupeau, amused by the rare passers, who had to be always jumping over streams of soapy water, said it reminded him of a place where one of his uncles had taken him when he was five. The delight of Gervaise was in a tree planted in the court, to the left of her window, an acacia, which spread out a single branch, a thin patch of green, which was enough to brighten the whole street.

It was on the last of April that Gervaise was confined. The pains came upon her in the afternoon about four, as she was ironing a pair of curtains at Madame Fauconnier's. She would not go at once, and remained there rocking to and fro on a chair, passing the iron over the curtains when she felt a little easier; the curtains were urgent, she *would* finish them. Then, after all, it was perhaps only a colic, it was not worth paying too much heed to a mere stomach-ache. But, as she was speaking of beginning some shirts, she turned white, and had to leave the

shop, and hasten across the street, bent in two, holding on to the walls. One of the work-girls offered to go with her. She refused, only asking her to go and call the midwife near by, Rue de la Charbonnière. Her time was not come yet, no doubt; she would have all the day and night before her. It would not hinder her from getting Coupeau's dinner ready; after that she would lie down a bit, without undressing. On the stairs she was taken with such an agony that she had to sit down right in the middle of the staircase; and she held both her hands over her mouth, so that she should not scream, for she could not bear the idea of some man coming up, and finding her there. The pain passed over, she could open her door, feeling easier, fancying she had made a mistake. She was preparing that evening a mutton stew with trimmings of chops. All seemed well as she peeled the potatoes. The bits of chop were in the saucepan when the sweats and throes took her again. She stirred her sauce, shifting from foot to foot before the stove, her eyes blinded with great tears. If she were going to be confined, that was no reason for letting Coupeau go without his dinner. At last the stew simmered away over a fire covered with ashes. She returned to the room, thinking she had time to lay one end of the table. She nearly dropped the bottle of wine; she had not strength enough to reach the bed, and she fell on the ground, and was confined there on the matting. When the midwife arrived, a quarter of an hour too late, it was there that she delivered her.

The zinc-worker was still employed at the

hospital. Gervaise would not have him summoned. When he came in at seven o'clock he found her in bed, well wrapped up, looking very pale against the pillow. The baby was crying, swaddled in a shawl, at its mother's feet.

"Oh, my poor wife!" said Coupeau, embracing her. "And to think I was laughing and joking only an hour ago when you were yelling away as hard as you could. I say, you're quick enough about it; it's all over before one has time to sneeze."

She smiled feebly; then she murmured,—

"It's a girl."

"Good," cried Coupeau, taking it jokingly in order to cheer her up; "just what I ordered. The order is already attended to. You get me whatever I want."

And taking up the baby he went on,—

"Let's see a bit of you, little miss slut. You have a very black little phiz. But that'll get whiter, never fear. Now you must be good, you mustn't go on the loose; you must grow up sensible, like papa and mamma."

Gervaise looked solemnly at the baby with wide-open eyes in which there was a touch of sadness. She shook her head; she would rather have had a boy, because boys can look out for themselves, and don't run such risks in Paris. The midwife had to take the little creature out of Coupeau's hands. She declared that Gervaise must not talk; it was bad enough to be making such a noise all around her. Thereupon the zinc-worker said that he must go and tell the news to his mother and the Lorilleux

but he was dying of hunger, he must have some dinner first. It was very painful to Gervaise to lie there and see him waiting on himself, running to the kitchen to fetch the stew, eating out of a cracked plate, not able to find the bread. Despite her orders, she lamented, and turned uneasily between the sheets. It was so silly not to have been able to lay the table; the colic had knocked her over like the blow of a stick. Her poor man musn't be angry, to see her there cockering herself in bed, while he had such a poor meal. Were the potatoes cooked enough, any way? She did not remember if she had put in the salt.

"Now be quiet!" cried the midwife.

"Ah! if you could only cure her of worrying herself!" said Coupeau, with his mouth full. "If you were not here, I wager she'd get up to cut my bread for me. Lie still and be easy, you great silly! You must take care of yourself, or you'll have a fortnight's job of it before you're on your legs again. Your stew is awfully good. Perhaps Madame will have some with me. Won't you, Madame?"

The midwife declined, but she would take a glass of wine with pleasure; it had given her quite a turn, she said, to find the poor woman and the baby on the matting. At last Coupeau departed to tell the news to his family. In half an hour, he had returned with them all, old Madame Coupeau, the Lorilleux, Madame Lerat, whom he had found at the house of the latter. The Lorilleux, now that things were going so prosperously, had become quite amiable, and always praised Gervaise to the skies, with little

gestures of reservation, little nods, little winks, as if to put off their own verdict in the matter. They knew what they knew; only they had no desire to go contrary to the received opinion of the neighbourhood.

"Here's the whole lot of them!" cried Coupeau. "I told them not to, but they would come. Don't you open your mouth, you're not allowed to. They will keep quiet, and have a look at you; without offence, eh? I'm going to make some coffee, real fine!"

He disappeared into the kitchen. Old Madame Coupeau, after embracing Gervaise, exclaimed at the heaviness of the child. The two other women also printed big kisses on the invalid's cheeks. And all three, standing around the bed, went over all the details of lyings-in: not so much after all, just like having out a tooth. Madame Lerat examined the infant all over, and declared it well formed, adding, with much meaning, that it would make a fine woman; and as its head seemed to her too pointed, she gently pressed it in, despite its cries, so as to round it out properly. Madame Lorilleux tore the baby angrily from her: it was enough to spoil the creature to pull it about like that when its skull was so tender. Then they tried to find likenesses, and nearly quarrelled over them. Lorilleux, who was peering over the women's shoulders, declared that the little object hadn't anything of Coupeau; the nose a little, perhaps, but that was all. It was just like its mother, with eyes different from either; certainly those eyes didn't come out of their family.

Meanwhile, Coupeau did not return; he could be heard in the kitchen, clattering about with the stove and the coffee-pot. Gervaise was quite uneasy: it was not a man's work making coffee, and she called to him what he ought to do, without heeding the energetic "hush!" of the midwife.

"Here, take the lot!" cried Coupeau, coming in with the coffee-pot in his hand. "It is a bore! It is a beastly nuisance! We must drink it out of glasses, if you don't mind; because you see, the cups are still at the shop-keeper's."

They sat down to the table, and Coupeau insisted on pouring out the coffee himself. It was jolly strong, not dish-water this time! When the midwife had sipped her coffee, she departed: things were going all right, she was no longer wanted; if the patient had a bad night, send for her in the morning. She was still on the stairs when Madame Lorilleux began to abuse her as a lick-fingers and good for nothing. She put four knobs of sugar in her coffee, and she charged fifteen francs for merely letting you be confined all by yourself. But Coupeau stood up for her; he would willingly have given her more than fifteen francs; after all, those women had spent a lifetime in studying, they did rightly to charge dear. Then Lorilleux began to dispute with Madame Lerat; he declaring that, in order to have a boy, you ought to turn the head of your bed to the north; she, shrugging her shoulders, and declaring that it was all nonsense; but that an infallible recipe was to hide under the mattress, without letting your wife know, a handful of fresh nettles, picked in the open air. The table

had been moved up by the side of the bed. Till ten o'clock, Gervaise, gradually sinking into an immense fatigue, lay smiling and vacant, her head turned over on the pillow; she saw and heard, but she had no strength to move or speak; it seemed to her that she was dead, very sweetly dead, and happy, a great way off, in seeing other people live. From time to time the baby gave a little wail, which came to her ears amongst the sound of loud voices, making interminable reflections on a murder that had been committed in the Rue du Bon-Puits, at the other end of La Chapelle.

Then, when everybody was ready to go, there was some talk of the baptism. The Lorilleux had consented to be godfather and godmother; they grumbled a bit, but they would have been greatly offended if they had not been asked. Coupeau did not at all see the necessity of baptizing the child; it certainly wouldn't bring him in ten thousand a year, and it would perhaps give the child a cold. The less one had to do with the priests the better. But old Madame Coupeau declared that he was a heathen; and the Lorilleux, without thinking it necessary to go and take the sacrament in church, prided themselves on having religion.

"Let it be Sunday, if you will," said the chain-maker.

And Gervaise having agreed with a little motion of her head, everybody kissed her and told her to take care of herself. Then they said good-bye to the baby. One after another they leant over the poor little quivering body, with little chirrups and tender words,

as if it could understand them. They called it Nana the pet name of Anna, its godmother's name.

"Good-night, Nana. Now, Nana, be a good girl."

When they had all gone, Coupeau drew up his chair against the bed, and finished his pipe, holding the hand of Gervaise in his. He smoked slowly, speaking between two whiffs; he was deeply moved.

"Well, old girl, have they given you a headache? You know I couldn't hinder them from coming after it, it shews they are friendly. But we're better all by ourselves, aren't we? I wanted to have you all to myself for a bit. All the evening did seem long! Poor little thing; she did have a time of it! Those precious kids, when they come into the world, they don't know all the trouble they give. Sure, it must be like having your loins laid open. Let me kiss the place and make it well."

He had slipped one of his great hands delicately under her, and he drew her towards him; he kissed her body through the bed-clothes, with a rough man's tenderness for the still aching child-bearer. He asked her if it hurt her; he would have liked to heal her in a breath. And Gervaise was very happy. She declared that she was not suffering at all. She only wanted to get up again as soon as possible; because it would never do to fold one's arms now. But he reassured her. Wouldn't he make it his business to provide for the little one? He would be a great blackguard if he ever left the urchin in want. It didn't seem to him a great thing to know how to beget a child; the credit, surely, was in bringing it up.

That night Coupeau never slept. He had covered in the fire in the stove, and every hour he had to get up to give the baby a teaspoonful of sugar and water just tepid. In the morning he went off to his work, nevertheless, just as usual. He even took advantage of the dinner-hour to go and make his declaration at the mayoralty. Meanwhile, Madame Boche, having heard the news, came to pass the day with Gervaise. But Gervaise, after ten hours of sound sleep, complained that she already felt quite stiff from keeping her bed so long. She would get quite ill if she were not allowed to get up. That night, when Coupeau returned, she told him all her troubles; of course she had perfect confidence in Madame Boche, only it made her quite mad to see a stranger take up her abode in the room, opening her drawers, handling her things. Next day the *concierge*, who had been sent out on an errand, found her up and dressed, sweeping up the place, and getting her husband's dinner. And she refused to go to bed again. Were they joking? It was all very well for rich ladies to pretend to be knocked up. Poor people hadn't the time. Three days after her confinement she was back ironing at Madame Fauconnier's, working and sweating in the fierce heat of the furnace.

On Saturday night, Madame Lorilleux brought her christening gifts: a little bonnet of thirty-five sous, and a christening robe, flounced and trimmed with a little lace, which she had had for six francs, because it had been standing by. Next day Lorilleux, as godfather, gave six pounds of sugar. They knew how to do things decently. On the evening too, at

the feast which took place at old Madame Coupeau's, they did not come empty-handed. The husband arrived with a bottle of wine, all sealed, under each arm, whilst the wife carried a large custard bought at a famous pastry-cook's in the Chaussée Clignancourt. Only, the Lorilleux went about telling everybody about their handsome presents; they had spent close upon twenty francs. Gervaise, when she heard of their tattling, was furious, and had no more sense of obligation to them for their generosity.

It was at the christening dinner that the Coupeaus made friends with their neighbours on the same landing. The other set of rooms in the little house was occupied by two people, a mother and son, called Goujet. Till then they had merely bowed on the staircase and in the street, without going any further; the neighbours seemed rather crusty. But the mother having carried up a can of water for Gervaise the day after her confinement, Gervaise thought it only decent to invite them to the feast, all the more so as they seemed to her quite nice people. And thereupon, naturally, they had got friendly.

The Goujets were from the Département du Nord. The mother mended lace, the son, a blacksmith by trade, worked in a manufactory of bolts. They had lived in the rooms on that landing for the last five years. Behind the silent quietude of their life lay buried a great sorrow: the father, in a moment of drunken madness, had killed a fellow-workman at Lille with a crow-bar, and had then hanged himself in his cell with a pocket-handkerchief. The widow and her child, coming to Paris after their great mis-

fortune, always seemed to feel this horror weighing upon them, and did their best to redeem it by a strict uprightness, an unalterable calmness and courage. They put, indeed, a certain amount of pride into it, for they came to look upon themselves as better than their neighbours. Madame Goujet, always dressed in black, her forehead framed in by a sort of nun's coif, had a matron's white, still face, as if the whiteness of the lace, the delicate work of her fingers, had cast upon her a shadow of serenity. Goujet was a superb giant of twenty-three, with rosy cheeks and blue eyes, and the strength of a Hercules. In the workshop he was known as Gueule-d'Or, on account of his yellow beard.

Gervaise felt at once a great liking for these people. When she paid them her first visit, she was astonished at the neatness of the place. It was incredible; you could not find a speck of dust anywhere, and the floor shone like glass. Madame Goujet took her into her son's room to have a look. It was white and sweet as a girl's room: a little iron bed with white muslin curtains, a table, a toilet-stand, some narrow shelves hung on the wall, with pictures from top to bottom of the walls, pictures cut out, coloured prints fixed up with four nails, portraits of all sorts of people, from the illustrated papers. Madame Goujet said with a smile that her son was a great child. He got tired of reading in the evenings; then he liked looking at his pictures. Gervaise spent nearly an hour in at her neighbour's, who had returned to her frame by the window. She was absorbed in the hundreds of pins fastening on the lace, and she felt

happy at being there, breathing the good, cleanly odour of the place, into which the delicate work brought a sort of meditative silence.

The Goujets grew on acquaintance. They worked hard all day, and put more than a quarter of their fortnight's money in the savings' bank. The neighbours treated them with respect, and spoke of their economies. Goujet never had a hole in his things, and always went out with spotless jackets. He was very polite, indeed rather timid, despite his great shoulders. The washerwomen at the end of the street laughed to see him look down as he went by. He did not like their coarse language, thought it disgusting that women should always have dirty words in their mouths. One day, however, he came in drunk. Thereupon, Madame Goujet, without a word, placed before him a portrait of his father, a wretched painting, piously laid away at the bottom of the chest of drawers. Since that lesson Goujet drank only very moderately, without however taking a dislike to wine, for wine is needful to a worker. On Sunday he went out with his mother on his arm, generally in the direction of Vincennes, sometimes he took her to the theatre. He simply idolised his mother, to whom he still spoke as if he were a child. With his square head, his heavy frame, torpid after the hard work at the anvil, he was like a great animal, dull of intellect and good of heart.

For a little while Gervaise put him out considerably. Then, after a few weeks, he got quite accustomed to her. He was on the look-out for her, to shew her his parcels, treating her just like a sister,

with blunt familiarity, and cutting out his figures under her direction. One morning, however, having turned the key without knocking, he surprised her half undressed, washing her neck; and for a week afterwards he dared not look her in the face, so that finally he made her blush herself.

Cadet-Cassis, with his Parisian jabber, thought him a blockhead. It was all very well not to swill, not to be after the girls, but, all the same, a man must be a man, or he may as well wear petticoats at once. He joked him before Gervaise, accusing him of making eyes at all the women in the neighbourhood; and the big booby defended himself violently. In spite of all, the two workmen were good friends. They called one another in the morning, started together, and sometimes had a glass of beer together before coming in. Since the christening feast they spoke to one another in the second person, because using the third was so much more to say. They had got to that point, and no further, when Gueule-d'Or rendered Cadet-Cassis a great service, one of those signal services which can never be forgotten. It was the 2nd of December. The zinc-worker, just for fun, had gone out to see the disturbance; he didn't care two pins for Bonaparte, the Republic, or the whole blooming lot, only he loved the smell of powder, and it seemed amusing to see people shooting one another; and he came very near being nabbed behind a barricade, only the blacksmith, turning up at the right moment, had thrown himself in the way, and helped him to cut and run. Goujet, as they returned up the Rue du Faubourg-Poisson-

nière, walked fast, looking very serious. He interested himself in politics, and was a serious Republican, in the name of justice and the general good. Only he had not taken part in the fighting, and he gave his reasons; the people were tired of burning their fingers for the middle classes in pulling their chestnuts out of the fire for them; February and June had taught them a good lesson, and now in future the suburbs would leave it to the city to fight its own battles. Then, as they reached the top of the Rue des Poissonniers, he turned and looked back over Paris; they were bungling up a fine piece of business down there, all the same, and perhaps some day the people would repent of having crossed its arms and done nothing. But Coupeau merely sneered, and declared that people were too idiotic to risk their skins just in order to keep the damned lazy-bones of the House going, on their twenty-five francs. In the evening the Coupeaus invited the Goujets to dinner. At dessert Cadet-Cassis and Gueule-d'Or solemnly kissed one another on each cheek; now they were sworn friends through thick and thin.

For three years the life of the two households on each side of the landing went on without an incident. Gervaise had nursed her child without losing, at the outside, more than two days' work a week. And she had now got to be a good work-woman, and earned as much as three francs. So she was able to put Etienne, who was soon going on for eight, in a little boarding-school in the Rue de Chartres, where she had to pay five francs. Despite the expenses connected with the two children, they now put aside

twenty or thirty francs every month in the savings' bank. When their savings had reached the sum of six hundred francs, Gervaise could hardly sleep for thinking of plans for the future; she would like to set up for herself, take a little shop, and have workwomen of her own. She had worked it all out. At the end of twenty years, if they had plenty of work, they would have a regular income of their own, which they would retire upon somewhere in the country. Nevertheless, she dared not run the risk. She said she was looking out for a shop, in order to give herself time to think it well over. The money lost nothing in the savings' bank; on the contrary, it added to its stock. In three years she had indulged herself with one of her great desires, she had bought a clock; though for this clock, which was made of coloured marble, with twisted columns and a gilded brass pendulum, she had to pay out instalments of twenty sous every Monday during the whole year. She was quite vexed when Coupeau spoke of winding it up; she would allow no one but herself to take off the glass shade, and she wiped down the columns reverentially, as if the marble of her chest of drawers were transformed into a church. Under the shade, behind the pendulum, she hid away the savings' bank book. And often, when she dreamed of her shop, she went into a brown study in front of the clock, staring fixedly at the hands as they turned, as if she were waiting for some particular and solemn moment in which to decide.

The Coupeaus went out almost every Sunday with the Goujets. They were pleasant little excur-

sions; some fried fish at Saint-Ouen, some rabbit at Vincennes, eaten anyhow, under the arbour of an eating-house. The men had something to drink when they felt thirsty, and came home as sober as could be, giving their arm to the ladies. At night, before going to bed, both households made up their accounts, and shared the expenses equally; never was there a dispute as to a penny more or less. The Lorilleux were jealous of the Goujets. It seemed strange, surely, for Cadet-Cassis and the Clop-clop to be always going about with strangers when they had relations of their own. Oh, no doubt, they only looked upon their relations as an encumbrance! As soon as they had put aside four sous they were nice and independent. Madame Lorilleux, greatly vexed to see her brother getting away from her influence, began to talk no end of abuse against Gervaise. Madame Lerat, on the other hand, took the young woman's part, and related extraordinary tales, attempts upon her honour on the boulevard at night, from which she came out melodramatically, boxing the ears of her cowardly pursuers. As for old Madame Coupeau, she did her best to settle up the differences all round, to make herself agreeable to all her children; her sight was giving way more and more; she had a roof over her, but that was all, and she was glad of a few francs now and again from one and another.

On Nana's third birthday, when Coupeau came home at night, he found Gervaise in a great state of excitement. She would not say what it was about; it was nothing, she said. But when she began to lay the table all topsy-turvy, stopping to think with

the plates in her hands, her husband insisted on knowing what was up.

"Well, it's this," she admitted at last, "the little haberdasher's shop in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or is to let. I saw it only an hour ago, when I went out to get some thread. It gave me quite a turn."

It was a neat little shop, and in the very house where they had formerly wanted to live. There was the shop, a back parlour, and two other rooms, to right and left; in short, all they needed, rather small rooms, but well laid out. Only it seemed to her too dear; the landlord spoke of five hundred francs.

"You went in then, and asked the price?" said Coupeau.

"Oh, just as a matter of curiosity, you know," she replied, trying to put on an air of indifference. "One looks about, one goes in wherever there is a poster: that binds you to nothing. But it is too dear; there's no doubt about it. Then it would be silly, I daresay, to set up for myself."

However, after dinner, she returned to the subject of the haberdasher's shop. She drew the plan of the house on the margin of a newspaper, and, little by little, she talked about it, measured all the corners, arranged all the order of the rooms, as if she were going to put her furniture into them to-morrow. Thereupon, Coupeau, seeing how she longed after it, urged her to take it; it was certain, she would find nothing decent under five hundred francs; besides, she might, perhaps, get something taken off. The only tedious part of the business was to go and live

in the same house with the Lorilleux, whom she couldn't abide. But she fired up, declared she hated nobody; and, in the heat of her desire, she even stood up for the Lorilleux; they were not bad at heart. She would get on with them all right. When they had gone to bed, Coupeau went off to sleep, while she still continued making arrangements for the fitting up of the place before she had even definitely agreed to take it.

Next day, as soon as she was alone, she could not resist taking off the shade of the clock, and looking at the savings' bank book. To think that her shop was there, in those soiled leaves with their smudgy handwriting! Before going out to work, she asked the advice of Madame Goujet, who greatly approved of her project of setting up for herself; with a husband like hers, a decent fellow, who didn't drink, she was certain to make a good thing of it, and not get in arrears. At the hour of *déjeuner* she even went up to see the Lorilleux, so as to have their opinion; she did not wish to seem to be doing anything without consulting her relations. Madame Lorilleux was quite overwhelmed. What! the Clop-clop was already going to set up shop? And, disgusted as she was, she tried to appear very pleased: no doubt the shop was just the thing, Gervaise was right in taking it. However, when she had recovered herself, she and her husband spoke of the dampness of the court, the darkness of the rooms on the ground-floor. Oh! it was quite the place to get rheumatism. However, as she had made up her mind to take it, their objection, most assuredly, would not hinder her from taking it.

That evening Gervaise frankly confessed, laughing, that it would have made her quite ill if she could not have had the shop. However, before saying "Done!" she wanted Coupeau to come and see the place, and try and get something taken off from the rent.

"Well then, to-morrow, if you like," said her husband. "You can call for me just before six at the house where I am working, Rue de la Nation, and we will look in at the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or on our way home."

Coupeau was just finishing the roofing of a new three-story house. That day, in fact, he had to put on the last sheets of zinc. As the roof was almost flat, he had set up his bench there, a large plank on two trestles. It was a beautiful May sunset, which touched the chimneys with gold. And, high up against the clear sky, the workman quietly cut out his zinc with shears, leaning over his bench like a tailor cutting out a pair of trousers in his shop. Against the wall of the neighbouring house his assistant, a blonde slim youth of seventeen, kept the fire burning in the brazier by working a pair of bellows, which at every puff blew out a cloud of sparks.

"Hi, Zidore, put in the irons!" cried Coupeau.

The assistant thrust the soldering-irons into the flame, which looked, in the open air, a pale rose colour. Then he began to blow the bellows again. Coupeau held the last sheet of zinc. It had to be fixed at the edge of the roof, near the gutter; just there, there was a sharp descent, and below gaped the open mouth of the street. The zinc-worker, quite at home in his list

slippers, advanced in a leisurely manner, whistling the air, "Ohé! les p'tits agneaux!" Arrived at the spot, he let himself slide, propped his knee against the brickwork of a chimney, and remained half-way out over the street, one of his legs hanging over. When he turned to call out to that lumpish Zidore, he caught hold of a corner of the brickwork, on account of the pavement down below.

"Come now, you infernal dawdler! Give me the irons! What are you staring at, you skinny bugger? Do you think the sky is going to fall?"

Zidore did not hurry himself. He was interested in some roofs near, in a great column of smoke that rose at the other end of Paris, Grenelle way; it was very likely a fire. However, he laid himself down on his stomach on the roof above and handed the irons to Coupeau. Then Coupeau began to solder the sheet of zinc. He squatted down, reached out, always managing to keep his balance, half sitting, perched on the point of his foot, holding on by a mere finger. He had an infernal assurance, a devil of a lot of confidence, he was quite free and comfortable in the face of danger. He was so accustomed to it. If anyone came to grief, it would be the street, not he. As he still went on smoking his pipe, he turned his head from time to time, and quietly spat into the street.

"Hallo, Madame Boche!" he cried, suddenly. "Hi! Madame Boche!"

He had seen the *concierge* crossing the street below. She raised her head and recognized him. Then they began to talk from roof to pavement. She covered her hands with her apron, and stood looking up. He

was now standing, his left arm round a pipe, leaning over.

"You haven't seen my wife?" he asked.

"No, indeed," replied the *concierge*. "Is she about here?"

"She is going to call for me. All well your way?"

"Oh! yes, thanks; I'm the worst of the lot! I'm just going to the Chaussée Clignancourt for a small leg of mutton. The butcher by the "Moulin Rouge" charges sixteen sous for it."

They had to raise their voices, a cart was passing, in the Rue de la Nation, along the broad deserted street; and their words, shouted out at the top of their voices, brought a little old woman to a window. And the old woman remained there leaning out, indulging in the luxury of a painful sensation, staring at the man on the roof opposite, as if she hoped every minute to see him fall.

"Well, good-night," cried Madame Boche, presently, "I won't hinder you."

Coupeau turned, and took the iron that Zidore handed him. But at the moment when the *concierge* was turning away, she saw Gervaise on the other side of the road, holding Nana by the hand. She had raised her head again to tell the zinc-worker, when Gervaise stopped her by an energetic movement, and in a low voice, fearing to be heard from above, she said what it was that frightened her. She was afraid if she let him see her all at once that it would give him a start, and he would fall over. In all these four years she had only once gone to call for him

when he was at work. To-day was the second time. She could not look on at it, it simply turned her head to see her man between heaven and earth, in places where even the sparrows did not venture.

"Yes, indeed, it isn't pleasant," murmured Madame Boche. "My husband is a tailor; I have no cause to be afraid."

"If you only knew, at first," went on Gervaise, "I was in a fright from morning to night. I kept seeing him all the time with his head crushed, carried on a shutter. Now I think no more about it. One gets used to everything. And one must earn one's living. All the same, it is a hard way to earn it, for one risks one's bones more than is needful."

She stopped, hiding Nana with her skirts, fearing the child would cry out. Despite herself, she could not help looking up; she went quite pale. Coupeau was just then soldering the extreme edge of the sheet of zinc by the gutter; he slid down as well as he could, unable to get into the proper position. Then he ventured along with a workman's slow movements, so easy and heavy. For a moment he hung right out over the road, not holding on at all, going on quietly with his work, and from below could be seen the little white crisp flame of the molten lead under the iron, worked carefully to and fro. Gervaise clasped her hands in silent agony, lifting them upward with a mechanical gesture of supplication. But she breathed again, Coupeau had made his way up the roof once more, deliberately spitting down into the street again.

"Ah! there you are spying on me!" he cried

gaily, catching sight of her. "She was in a funk, wasn't she, Madame Boche? and wouldn't let you call to me. Wait for me, I have just ten minutes more work."

He had to fix a chimney-pot, a mere nothing. The washerwoman and the *concierge* stood in the street talking over the gossip of the neighbourhood, and keeping an eye on Nana, so that she should not dabble in the gutter, where she was looking for little fish; and the two women looked back now and again to the roof with smiles and nods, as if to say that they were not impatient. The little old woman opposite had not left her window, watching the man, and waiting.

"What is she spying after, the old mare?" said Madame Boche. "What a horrid phiz!"

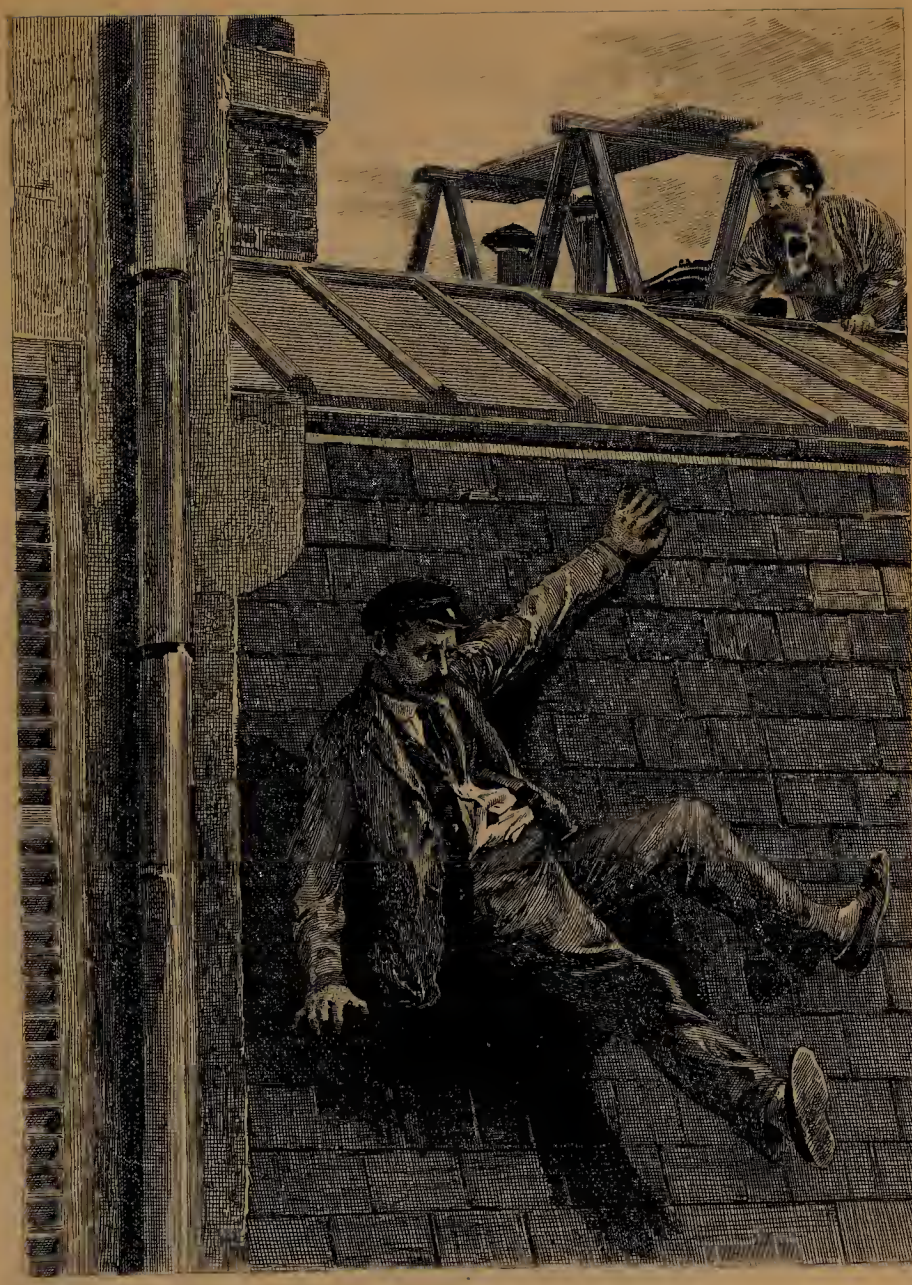
From above they heard the loud voice of the zinc-worker singing, "Ah! qu'il fait donc bon cueillir la fraise!" Now, bending over his bench, he worked away at his zinc like an artist. He traced a line with the compass, and then cut out a large fan-shaped slice by means of a pair of circular scissors; then, lightly with his hammer, he beat the piece into the shape of a toadstool. Zidore went on, blowing at the brazier. The sun set behind the house in a bright rose-colour, slowly paling into a faint lilac. And against the sky, at this peaceful hour of the day, the silhouettes of the two workmen, increased to an enormous size, stood out in the limpid air, with the dark outline of the bench and the strange profile of the bellows.

When the chimney-pot was cut out, Coupeau called out,—

Chapter IV

The zinc-worker tried to lean over, but his foot slipped. Then, all at once, clumsily, like a cat that has got its feet caught, he rolled over and over, down the slight incline of the roof, without being able to save himself.

"Damnation!" he cried, in a choked voice.



"Zidore, the irons!"

But Zidore had disappeared. The zinc-worker cursed and stared all round, and shouted down the sky-light of the garret, which had been left open. Finally he discovered him on a neigbouring roof, two houses off. The young rascal was exploring all round about, his scrimpy blonde hair blown about by the gusts of wind, blinking his eyes at the immensity of Paris.

"I say, dawdler, do you think you are in the country?" said Coupeau, angrily. "You are like Monsieur Béranger, you compose verses, I suppose! Will you give me the irons? Did you ever! taking a little stroll on the roofs! Wouldn't you like to bring your young woman here, right off, and give her a serenade? Will you give me the irons, you damned muff you?"

He did his soldering, calling out to Gervaise,—

"There, it's all done. I am coming down."

The flue to which he had to fit the chimney-pot was just in the middle of the roof. Gervaise, at ease now, smiled as she followed his movements. Nana, delighted at suddenly catching sight of her father, clapped her little hands. She was sitting on the pavement, so as to see him better at that distance.

"Papa! papa!" she cried, as loud as she could; "papa! look!"

The zinc-worker tried to lean over, but his foot slipped. Then, all at once, clumsily, like a cat that has got its feet caught, he rolled over and over, down the slight incline of the roof, without being able to save himself.

"Damnation!" he cried, in a choked voice.

And he fell. His body described a slack curve, turned twice on itself, and crashed down in the middle of the street with a thud like a bundle of linen dropped from a great height.

Gervaise, stupefied, gave one scream, and flung her arms into the air.

Passers by ran up, a crowd formed. Madame Boche, quite overcome, her legs trembling under her, took Nana in her arms, so as to cover her face and prevent her from seeing. Meanwhile, the little old woman opposite, as if satisfied, calmly closed her window.

Four men carried Coupeau into a chemist's, at the corner of the Rue des Poissonniers, and he lay there nearly an hour, in the middle of the shop, on a quilt, whilst someone went for a stretcher to the Hôpital Lariboisière. He still breathed, but the chemist shook his head gravely. Gervaise crouched on the ground, sobbing without intermission, her face drenched with tears, blinded and dazed. With a mechanical movement, she stretched out her hands, and felt over the limbs of her husband, very gently. Then she drew them back, catching sight of the chemist, who had forbidden her to touch him; and a few seconds after she began again, unable to refrain from assuring herself that he was warm, fancying she was doing him good, When the stretcher at last arrived, and there was some talk of taking him to the hospital, she got up, saying violently,—

"No, no, not to the hospital! We live in the Rue Neuve de la Goutte-d'Or."

It was useless to explain to her that it would

cost a lot of money if she took her husband home. She reiterated obstinately,—

"Rue Neuve de la Goutte-d'Or, I will shew you the door. What has it got to do with you? I have money. Isn't he my husband? He is coming home; I will have it."

So Coupeau was taken home. When the stretcher was carried through the crowd that had formed outside the chemist's shop, the women in the neighbourhood spoke of Gervaise with animation; she limped, it was true, but she was a plucky creature, all the same; she would bring her husband round, to a certainty, whilst at the hospital the doctors simply let you kick the bucket if you were too badly hurt, so as not to have the bore of curing you. Madame Boche, after having taken Nana home with her, had come back again, and she told the story of the accident with interminable details, still agitated with her fright.

"I was going to get a leg of mutton—I was there—I saw him fall," she repeated. "It was all through the child, he wanted to see her, and then—slap bang! Oh! Lord, Lord! I wouldn't like to see another fall. I must go and get my leg of mutton all the same."

For a week Coupeau was very bad. The relations, the neighbours, everyone, in short, expected at every moment to see him turn his toes up. The doctor—a very expensive doctor, who charged five francs for every visit—feared an internal lesion; and the word frightened everybody greatly; it was reported in the neighbourhood that the zinc-worker's

heart had been displaced by the shock. Only Gervaise, pale with all her sleepless nights, serious and collected, shrugged her shoulders. Her man had his right leg broken, that everybody knew; he would get over that. As for the rest, as for the displaced heart, it was all nonsense. She would soon put his heart into its right place again. She knew how to put a heart back into its right place, with care, cleanliness, good looking after. And she shewed a superb conviction, certain of curing him if only by staying by him and touching him with her hands in his hours of fever. She did not give way to doubt for an instant. She was on her feet for a whole week, speaking little, absorbed by her resolve to save him, forgetting the children, the street, the whole city. On the ninth day, when the doctor at last declared the patient out of danger, she sank on a chair, her legs giving way under her, all her strength gone, in a flood of tears. That night she consented to sleep for two hours, her head on the end of the bed.

Coupeau's accident had brought out all the family. Old Madame Coupeau passed her nights with Gervaise; only, after nine o'clock, she went to sleep in her chair. Every night, on her way home from work, Madame Lerat went a long way out of her road in order to have the latest news. The Lorilleux at first came two or three times a day, offering to share in staying up, even bringing an arm-chair for Gervaise. But quarrels soon arose as to the best way of looking after sick folk. Madame Lorilleux declared she had cured enough people in her life to know the proper way to

set about it. She accused Gervaise of hustling her out of the way, of driving her from her brother's bedside. Of course the Clop-clop was quite right in wishing to cure Coupeau herself; for, if she had not disturbed him at his work, he would never have fallen. Only, by the way in which she was treating him, she was certain to finish the job.

When Coupeau was out of danger Gervaise ceased to keep watch over his bed with such jealous vigilance. No one could kill him now, and she let people come near him without suspicion. Then the family took possession of the room. It was going to be a long convalescence; the doctor had spoken of four months. Then, during the zinc-worker's long hours of sleep, the Lorilleux pointed out to Gervaise how silly she was. Much good it did anybody, her having her husband in the house. At the hospital he would have been on his legs again in half the time. Lorilleux would just like to be ill, some trifle or other, to shew whether he would hesitate a second in entering Lariboisière. Madame Lorilleux knew a lady who had just come out; well, she had had a chicken morning and evening. And both, for the twentieth time, made the calculation of what all these four months of convalescence were going to cost. First the working days lost, then the doctor, the medicines, and afterwards the good wine, the underdone meat. If the Coupeaus only used up their bit of savings they ought to be jolly well glad; but they would certainly run into debt. Oh! that was their affair; only they must not count on their relations, who were not rich enough to support an

invalid at home. So much the worse for the Clop-clop, of course. She might just as well have done like everybody else, and let her man be taken to the hospital. That was the last touch: she was stuck up.

One day Madame Lorilleux was malicious enough to ask her suddenly,—

"Well, what of your shop? When are you going to take it?"

"Yes," sneered Lorilleux, "the *concierge* is still expecting you."

Gervaise was quite taken aback. She had completely forgotten the shop. But she saw the malicious delight they had in the thought that all her projects for the shop had gone to pot. And in fact, from that time onwards, they were on the look-out for occasions to joke her on her vanished dream. When anyone spoke of an unrealisable hope, they put it off to the day when she would have a shop of her own with a street front. And behind her back they laughed at her still worse. She did not like to think anything so dreadful; but, really, the Lorilleux seemed to be quite pleased with Coupeau's accident, seeing that it had hindered her from setting up a laundry in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or.

Thereupon she joined in the laugh herself, and took a pride in shewing how willingly she gave up the money for her husband's recovery. Every time she took out the savings' bank book in their presence, from under the shade of the clock, she said, laughingly,—

"I am going out; I am going to take my shop."

She would not withdraw the money all at once. She asked for it a hundred francs at a time, so as not to keep such a lot of gold in her chest of drawers; besides, she had vague dreams of some miracle, a sudden rallying, which would not force her to take out the whole amount. Every time she came in after her visit to the savings' bank she added up on a piece of paper how much money they had left. It was merely an orderly habit. However much she was obliged to pick into her little stock, she still made up the accounts of this inroad into their savings. Wasn't it some sort of consolation to put the money to such good use, to have it to draw upon in their misfortune? And without a regret she put the book carefully back behind the clock, under the glass case.

The Goujets were extremely nice to Gervaise during Coupeau's illness. Madame Goujet was at her beck and call the whole time; she never went out without looking in to know if she was in want of sugar, or butter, or salt; she always sent over to her the first drop of broth when she had a *pot-au-feu;* she even looked after the kitchen for her if she was too busy, and gave her a hand with the plates and dishes. Goujet carried her cans to the tap in the Rue des Poissonniers, and filled them for her every morning; that was a saving of two sous. Then after dinner, when the relations were not about, the Goujets would come into the Coupeaus' and keep them company. For two hours, until ten o'clock, the blacksmith smoked his pipe, and watched Gervaise moving about the sick man. He did not say ten words in the course of the evening. His great

blonde head sunk between his huge shoulders, he was absorbed in watching her preparing the invalid's gruel, stirring up the sugar without making a noise with the spoon. When she tucked up the bed, and cheered up Coupeau with her soft voice, he was quite overcome. Never had he come across such a real good woman. It was all the more credit to her to limp, seeing how she was on the move all day about her husband. It was incredible; she never sat down for a minute, hardly even to take her meals. She was constantly running over to the chemist's, she had to mess about with all sorts of things, she worked like a nigger to keep the room in order, the room in which everything had to be done; and for all this, not a complaint, always amiable, even in the evening, when she was so tired that she could hardly keep her eyes open. And the blacksmith, watching her and wondering at her devotion, in the midst of all the medicine bottles strewed about the place, took a great affection for Gervaise, seeing how she put her whole soul into the task of looking after her husband.

"I say old chap," he said one day to the convalescent, "you'll soon be patched up again; I never doubted it. I declare your wife is God Almighty!"

He himself was thinking about getting married; at least, his mother had found a very suitable girl, a lace-maker like herself, whom she was very anxious for him to marry. To please her he said yes; and the marriage was fixed for the beginning of September. The money for setting up house had long been laid by in the savings' bank. But he shook his head when

Gervaise spoke to him of his marriage, and he murmured in his slow voice,—

"All women are not like you, Madame Gervaise. If women were all like you, one would marry any amount of them."

Meanwhile Coupeau, at the end of two months, could get up a little. He could not walk many steps, only from the bed to the window, and supported by Gervaise. There he sat himself down in the Lorilleux's arm-chair, his right leg stretched out on a hassock. He had always laughed at broken bones, and he was greatly annoyed by his accident. He could not get over his annoyance. The whole two months he had spent in bed he had cursed and stormed at everybody. A pretty sort of existence this was, to lie on your back with your leg tied up stiff as a sausage. He would soon get to know the ceiling, at any rate; there was a crevice in the corner of the recess which he could draw with his eyes shut. Then, when he could sit out in the chair, it was another story. Was he going to stay there all his life, nailed to the chair, like a mummy? The street wasn't so very amusing to look at, nobody ever passed; it stank all day long of salts of lemon. It was too tedious, he would give ten years of his life to be able merely to go and see how the fortifications were getting on. And he returned again and again to his violent accusations against fate. His accident was not fair; it oughtn't to have happened to him, a good workman like him, neither a dawdler nor a drunkard. He might have understood in the case of others.

"Old Coupeau," he said, "broke his neck because he was tight. I don't say that ought to have happened, but at all events it explains itself. But for my part, I hadn't taken a drop, and over I go merely in turning to wave my hand to Nana. I call that a little too strong! If there's any God Almighty at all, He arranges things very queerly. I can't quite swallow it."

When he was able to get about again, he still kept a deep aversion against his work. It was a luckless trade, crawling about all day long like a cat on the house roof. Not bad of people to send you out to get killed, and too much cowards themselves to venture upon a ladder, sticking at home by their fires, and not caring two pins for the rest of the world. And he went so far as to say that everyone should put on his zinc for himself. Hang it all! it was only justice; that was the general rule—if you don't want to be wet, get under cover. Then he regretted that he had not learnt another trade, pleasanter and not so risky, a cabinet-maker's, for instance. It was old Coupeau's fault again; fathers were so silly, to always want their children to do as they had done.

For two months longer Coupeau had to walk on crutches. First he was able to go down below, and smoke his pipe on the doorstep. Then he went as far as the outer boulevard, crawling along in the sun, remaining for whole hours sitting on a bench. His cheerfulness returned, his deuce of a tongue came back to him once more in his long strolls. And, in his delight at merely being alive, he loved to lounge

about doing nothing, his muscles relaxed into a peaceful slumber; it was like the slow inroad of idleness, which profited by his convalescence to soak into him, drowning him delightfully. His health returned, and his life seemed to him perfectly comfortable; why should it ever change? When he could get on without his crutches he took longer walks, and went the round of the workshops to see his old pals. He stood with his arms folded in front of houses that were building, sneering and shaking his head; and he joked the workmen who were bustling about, holding out his leg to shew them what you got by doing more than your fair share of work. Making fun of others while they worked satisfied his grudge against the work itself. Of course he would go back to it again, he must; but not before he could help it. Oh! he was paid out for his want of enthusiasm. Then it seemed so nice to dawdle about a bit!

In the afternoons, when Coupeau had nothing to do, he went in to see the Lorilleux. They condoled with him, and won him back by all sorts of nice little ways. For the first few years after his marriage he had got away from their influence, thanks to Gervaise. Now they got hold of him again, joking him about the fright he was in in regard to his wife. Let him be a man! Nevertheless, the Lorilleux were extremely discreet, and heaped up the most extravagant praises of Gervaise, and all her good qualities. Coupeau did not dispute them, but he assured his wife that his sister adored her, and told her she ought not to be so unfriendly herself. The first quarrel fell out one evening on the subject of Étienne. The zinc-worker

had been spending the afternoon with the Lorilleux, and on coming in, finding the dinner not ready and the children crying after the soup, he suddenly went for Étienne, and gave him two good boxes on the ear. And for an hour he muttered between his teeth: the brat wasn't his, he didn't know why he tolerated him in the house; he would send him about his business one of these days. Up to then he had accepted the child without any fuss. The next day he spoke of his dignity. Three days after, he took to kicking him from morning to night, so that when the child heard his step on the stairs, he would take refuge in at the Goujets', where the old lace-worker always kept a corner for him at the table.

Gervaise had now been back at her work for a long time. She had no need now to take on and off the shade of the clock; all the savings were gone, and it was necessary to buckle-to right hard, and do the work of four, for there were now four mouths to feed. She supported them all by herself. When people condoled with her, she quickly took off all the blame from Coupeau. Just think what he had suffered! it was not surprising if it had soured him a bit. But that would pass off when he was strong again. And if anyone intimated that Coupeau was strong enough now to go back to the yard, she protested vigorously. No, no, not yet. She didn't want to have him in bed again. She knew what the doctor had ordered. And it was she herself who kept him from work, telling him every morning to take his time, not to over-exert himself. She even slipt a franc now and again into his waistcoat pocket. Coupeau took it as the most

natural thing in the world; he complained of all sorts of pains and aches in order to be petted up. At the end of six months he was still convalescent. And now, when he did not go to look on at the others working, he was quite ready to have a glass with his pals. One really wasn't badly off in a wine-shop; it was jolly enough, and one only stayed five minutes. It was no disgrace to anybody. Only hypocrites pretended to drink because they were dying of thirst. It was quite right of people to have joked him about it before now: a glass of wine never killed a man. But he tapped his chest, and took a pride in drinking nothing but wine; always wine, never spirits; wine lengthened your life, didn't knock you up, and didn't make you tipsy. Nevertheless, several times, after days of idleness, spent in workshop after workshop, tavern after tavern, he came in slightly elevated. On those days Gervaise shut her door, pretending that she herself had a bad headache, in order to keep the Goujets from seeing the state Coupeau was in.

Little by little, however, Gervaise grew melancholy. Morning and evening she went to the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or to have another look at the shop, which was still to let; and she did not like to be seen, as if it were a childish whim that she indulged in, unworthy of serious people. This shop began to absorb all her thoughts; and at night, when the light was turned out, she found all the charm of forbidden fruit in still dreaming over it with her eyes open. She made her calculations over again: two hundred and fifty francs of rent, one hun-

dred and fifty francs for the fixings, a hundred francs in hand, on which to live for a fortnight; altogether five hundred francs at the lowest reckoning. If she did not talk much on the subject, it was for fear of seeming to be hankering after the savings swallowed up by Coupeau's illness. Sometimes she turned quite pale, finding she had let slip something about it, catching back her words in confusion, as if she had given utterance to some enormity. Now it would take four or five years of work before being able to put aside such a large sum. What distressed her was that she could not set up for herself at once; she would have kept the entire house going without counting upon Coupeau, allowing him a few months more to pick up inclination for work again; she would have been quite comfortable, certain of the future, disembarrassed of the secret fears that sometimes arose in her mind when he returned in a state of great jollity, singing and relating some fresh absurdity of that creature Mes-Bottes, to whom he had stood a bottle.

One evening, as Gervaise was alone, Goujet came in; he did not rush off at once as he was accustomed to do, but sat down and went on smoking, looking at her. He had evidently something important to communicate; he turned it over and over in his mind without being able to get it into proper order. At length, after a painful silence, he summoned up his courage, took his pipe out of his mouth, and said right off,—

"Madame Gervaise, will you allow me to lend you some money?"

She was leaning over a drawer of the chest of

drawers looking for some dusters. She looked up, very red. He must have seen her that morning, standing transfixed before the outside of the shop for nearly ten minutes. He smiled with an embarrassed air, as if he had made an unpalatable suggestion. But she declined sharply; never would she accept money without knowing when she would be able to return it. Then it was really too large an amount. And as he pressed it upon her, she finally cried in amazement,—

"But your marriage? I certainly can't take the money for your marriage!"

"Oh! don't trouble about that," he said, going red in turn. "I am not going to get married. A whim, you know .... Really, I would rather lend you the money."

At that they both looked down. There was something tender in the air, to which neither of them gave voice. And Gervaise accepted. Goujet had forewarned his mother. They crossed the landing, to go and find her at once. The old lace-worker was grave, a little sad, her calm face bent over her frame. She would not go against the wish of her son, but she did not even approve of Gervaise's project, and she said why, quite definitely. Coupeau was going to the bad; he would squander the whole business. She had never forgiven the zinc-worker for refusing to learn to read during his convalescence. The blacksmith had offered to teach him, but the other had told him to mind his own business, declaring that learning only made people thin. The two workmen had almost come to variance over it; each went on his own way. How-

ever, Madame Goujet, seeing the looks of entreaty of her big boy, was very kind to Gervaise. It was agreed that they should lend their neighbours five hundred francs, to be paid back in instalments of twenty francs a month until it was all made up.

"Good! The blacksmith is making eyes at you," cried Coupeau, merrily, when he heard the story. "Oh! I am quite easy; he is too simple for anything. We will pay him back all his money. But, all the same, if he had to do with rogues, he would get a nice bilking, he would."

On the very next day the Coupeaus took the shop. Gervaise was running to and fro all the day from the Rue Neuve to the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. The neighbours, seeing her darting lightly to and fro, so excited that she never limped at all, declared that she must have undergone an operation.

CHAPTER V

It happened that the Boches, since the April term, had left the Rue des Poissonniers, and had the *concierge's* lodge in the large house of the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. How oddly things turn out sometimes! One of the things that Gervaise dreaded, after having got on so well with the *concierge* of the Rue Neuve, was to fall under the power of some disagreeable creature, with whom one would get into trouble if one spilt a little water, or shut the door too loudly at night. *Concierges* are such a bad lot! But with the Boches it would be a pleasure. They were old friends; they were sure to get on together. It was like being in one's own family.

On the day of allotment, when the Coupeaus had to sign the lease, Gervaise felt a strange feeling come over her as she passed under the lofty entrance. She was really going to live in this big house, as big as a city, with its interminable streets stretching and twisting in staircase and corridor. The grey walls, with their rags drying at the windows, the dingy courtyard, with its pavement worn like the pavement of a public square, the dull rumbling of labour that sounded from within its walls, made a great impression

on her: half joy, to be at last near the goal of her ambition; half fear, lest after all she should not succeed, should be beaten down in the enormous fight against starvation which she heard going on around her. It seemed to her quite a daring thing to fling herself into the very midst of a machine in motion, while the hammers of the locksmiths and the planes of the cabinet-makers clattered and hissed from the workshops on the ground floor. That day the stream running out under the porch from the dyer's was a pale apple-green. She stepped across it gaily; the colour seemed to her a good omen.

They were to meet the landlord in the Boches' lodge. M. Marescot, a large cutler of the Rue de la Paix, had once turned a grindstone in the streets. He was now said to be worth several millions. He was a man of fifty-five, large, bony, decorated with the huge hands of an old workman; and one of his delights was to carry off the knives and scissors of his lodgers, which he sharpened himself for his own amusement. He was looked upon as not at all proud, because he spent hours in the lodges of his *concierges* making out all his accounts. He transacted all his business there. When the Coupeaus arrived, they found him at Madame Boche's greasy table, listening to the tale of how the sempstress of the second floor, staircase A, had refused to pay, with a disgusting epithet. Then, when they had signed the lease, he shook hands with the zinc-worker. He loved workers. He had himself had a pretty hard time of it. But there was no point you couldn't reach with work. And, having counted out the two hundred and fifty

francs of the first half-year, which he thrust into his huge pocket, he talked about his career and exhibited his decoration.

Meanwhile Gervaise was a little put out by the attitude of the Boches. They affected not to know her. They cringed before the landlord, hanging on his words, confirming him with nods. Madame Boche rushed out to drive away a band of children who had turned on the tap in the court, and were paddling about in the stream of water; and as she made her way back in her loftiest manner, looking along at the windows as if to assure herself that the house was all in order, she pursed up her lips, as much as to say that she was a person of considerable importance now that she had three hundred lodgers to look after. Boche went back to the subject of the sempstress on the second floor; he recommended turning her out, and he added up the terms in arrears, with the importance of a steward whose administration is in danger of being compromised. M. Marescot approved of the expulsion; but he would wait till the half term. It was hard on people to throw them right out on the street, all the more so as it didn't put a farthing into the landlord's pocket. And Gervaise, with a little shiver, asked herself if they would throw her, too, on the street, if a day came when bad luck were to prevent her from paying. The lodge, smoky, and filled with dingy furniture, was as damp and dismal as a cellar; all the light from the window fell on the tailor's working board, on which was spread an old frock-coat sent in to be turned; whilst Pauline, the Boches' child, a

red-haired little child of four, sat on the ground, staring solemnly at a piece of veal over the fire, absorbed and enchanted with the strong smell of cooking that came from the stove.

M. Marescot was again holding out his hand to the zinc-worker, when the latter spoke of repairs, and reminded him of his verbal promise of seeing about that later. But the landlord grew angry; he had promised nothing; besides, it was never customary to make repairs in a shop. However, he agreed to go and see the place, together with the Coupeaus and Boche. The little haberdasher had carried off the whole lot of his shelves and counters; the shop was perfectly bare, with its blackened ceiling, its unsightly walls, from which hung strips of an old yellow paper. There, in the echoing emptiness of the place, a furious discussion went on. M. Marescot declared that it was the business of shop-keepers to tidy up their shops, for a shop-keeper might want gold everywhere, and he as a landlord could not supply the gold; then he related his own experience in the Rue de la Paix, where he had spent more than twenty thousand francs. Gervaise, with her woman's obstinacy, stated over and over again an argument which seemed to her irrefutable: when you rent rooms, the landlord papers the walls; why should not a shop be the same as a room? She asked for nothing more; merely that he should whitewash the ceiling, and put on fresh paper.

Boche, meanwhile, remained solemn and impenetrable; he turned his head, looked in the air, giving

no opinion. Coupeau winked at him in vain, he affected not to wish to abuse his great influence with the landlord. Finally, however, he made a movement with his face, a little faint smile accompanied by a shake of the head. Just then, M. Marescot, in a state of exasperation, putting on an air of misery, and spreading out all his fingers with a cramped gesture like a miser, gave in to Gervaise, and promised the white-washing and papering, on condition that she paid half the cost of the paper. And he hurried away, refusing to listen to another word.

As soon as Boche was alone with the Coupeaus, he slapped them on the shoulder in the most exuberant manner. Well, that's done! But for him they would never have had their paper and their ceiling. Had they noticed how the landlord had consulted him out of the corner of his eye, and had decided at once on seeing him smile? Then, in confidence, he declared that he was the real master of the house. He decided who were to be given notice, let out rooms to those who seemed to him suitable, received the quarter's rent, which he had had for the last fortnight in his chest of drawers. That evening the Coupeaus, by way of thanking the Boches, thought they could do no better than send them two bottles of wine. They deserved a present.

On the following Monday the workmen began on the shop. The purchase of the paper was a very serious affair. Gervaise wanted a grey paper with blue flowers, so as to liven up the walls. Boche offered to take her with him; then she could choose. But he had strict orders from the landlord not to go

beyond fifteen sous a roll. They spent an hour in the shop. Gervaise returned again and again to a very pretty chintz at eighteen sous. She was in despair; all the other papers seemed to her hideous. At last the *concierge* gave way; he would square it up by counting in an additional roll if necessary. And Gervaise, on the way back, bought some little cakes for Pauline. She did not wish to be behindhand; it was quite to her advantage to be on good terms.

The shop ought to have been ready in four days. The work dragged on three weeks. First, there had been talk of simply washing the paint. But the paint, which had formerly been a reddish-brown, was so dirty and dingy that Gervaise resolved on having all the shop-front re-done in blue, with bands of gold. Then the repairs seemed never to come to an end. Coupeau, who was still doing no work, arrived early in the morning, to see how the work went. Boche left the frock-coat and trousers, of which he was mending the button-holes, and joined him in looking after the men. Both stood in front of the workmen, their hands behind their back, smoking and spitting, and spending the whole day in judging the effect of every stroke of the brush. There were interminable reflections, profound reveries, before a nail that had to be pulled out. The painters, two great jolly chaps, came down from their ladders every moment, and stood about in the middle of the shop, joining in the discussion, wagging their heads for hours before the work which they had scarcely begun. The ceiling was soon whitewashed, it was the paint that never seemed to be any further forward. It

would not dry. About nine o'clock the painters turned up with their paint-pots, laid them in a corner, gave a look round, and disappeared; they were not seen again for the day. They had gone to get their *déjeuner*, or they had had a small job to finish near by, Rue Myrrha. Other times Coupeau took out the whole lot to have a drink, Boche, the painters, and any fellow-workman who might be passing; there was another afternoon wasted. Gervaise was beside herself. Suddenly, in two days, everything was finished, the paint varnished, the paper put on, the refuse carted away. The workmen had worked it off as if in sport; whistling on their ladders, and singing until they deafened all the community.

The house-moving took place at once. Gervaise, for the first few days, was as happy as a child when she crossed the street on her way home from an errand. She paused, and smiled across at her home. From a distance, in the midst of the black file of the other shops, her shop looked quite bright, with a new gaiety in its pale blue sign, on which the words, "Blanchisseuse de fin," were painted in large gilt letters. In the window, closed at the back with little muslin curtains, and papered in blue so as to shew off the whiteness of the linen, men's shirts were laid out, and women's caps were hung up, the strings tied to brass wires. And her shop looked to her beautiful, all azure like the sky. It was blue inside as well as outside; the paper, an imitation of Pompadour chintz, represented a vine arbour overrun with creepers; the ironing-board, an immense table taking up two-thirds of the place, was covered with a heavy

ironing-blanket, and draped with a piece of crétonne with large blue flowers, to hide the trestles. Gervaise seated herself on a stool, overpowered with satisfaction, enchanted with the pretty neatness of things, tenderly regarding all her new apparatus. But her first glance went always to her ironing-stove, a stove of cast-iron, on which ten irons could be heated at once, ranged all round on slanting slabs. She would kneel down and look inside, always frightened lest her silly little apprentice would burst the stove by stuffing it too full of coke.

The rooms behind the shop were very comfortable. The Coupeaus slept in the first room, at once kitchen and dining-room; a door at the back opened on the court-yard. Nana's bed was in a little room on the right, which got its light from a round window near the ceiling. As for Étienne, he shared the room on the left with the dirty clothes, always lying about the ground in great heaps. Nevertheless, there was one inconvenience, though at first they scarcely liked to admit it, but the walls ran with water, and there was hardly any light after three o'clock.

The new shop made a great sensation in the neighbourhood. The Coupeaus were going ahead at too great a rate, said the neighbours, and would get into difficulties. They had, in fact, spent the whole of the five hundred francs of the Goujets setting up the place, without keeping enough for the fortnight's expenses on which they had counted. The day when Gervaise took down her shutters for the first time, she had just six francs in her purse. But she had no uneasiness in the matter, business flowed in, the

enterprise looked quite promising. A week afterwards, before going to bed, she spent two hours in making out her calculations on a scrap of paper; and she woke up Coupeau, her face all aglow, to tell him that there was money to be gained, by the hundred and thousand, if they were sensible.

"Well, well!" cried Madame Lorilleux to everybody, "my idiot of a brother has a droll way of going on! Very nice of the Clop-clop to set up on her own account! It looks well, doesn't it?"

The Lorilleux were now at deadly enmity with Gervaise. From the very first, while the repairs were going on, they were bursting with rage; they went by on the other side of the street, so as not even to look at the painters; they passed upstairs with set teeth. This good-for-nothing with her blue shop, it was enough to drive decent people frantic. And on the very second day, as the apprentice was emptying out a bowl of starch, just as Madame Lorilleux came out, she had raised the street with her outcries against her sister-in-law for putting her work-people to insult her. All friendly relations were entirely broken off, they glared at one another whenever they met.

"Yes, nice goings on!" declared Madame Lorilleux. "We know very well where the money comes from, the money for her shop. She earned that off the blacksmith. Nice people they are, too, on that side! Didn't the father cut off his head with a knife, so as to escape the guillotine? At any rate, some dirty story of the kind!"

She flatly accused Gervaise of going to bed with

the blacksmith. She invented a story as to having surprised them together one evening on a seat on the outer boulevard. The thought of this *liaison*, and the pleasure her sister-in-law must get out of it, exasperated her all the more from her own propriety, the propriety of an ugly woman. Every day the cry of her heart came to her lips,—

"What is there in her, then, this cripple, to set men after her? Does anyone come after me?"

Then she spread interminable scandals among the neighbours. She told the whole story. Why, on the wedding-day she had had a very queer look about her. As for herself, she had a sharp nose; she felt at once how it was going to turn out. Then, afterwards, the Clop-clop had made herself out so sweet, so artful, that she and her husband, out of regard for Coupeau, had consented to be godfather and godmother for Nana; though it was a pretty experience, that christening. But now the Clop-clop might be in the very article of death, and in need of a glass of water, it certainly wouldn't be she who would give it to her. She didn't favour saucy people, nor sluts, nor strumpets. As for Nana, she would always be welcome if she came to see her godfather and godmother; the child was not responsible for the sins of her father and mother. Coupeau had no need of advice; anyone else, in his place, would have let out with his fist at his wife, and soused her backside in a bucket; however, that was his own look-out; they only asked him to have a little respect for the feelings of his family. Good God! if she, Madame Lorilleux, had caught Lorilleux in the

act, she would not have let it pass so quietly; she would have planted her scissors in his belly.

Meanwhile the Boches, who passed severe judgment on all the quarrels in the house, found the Lorilleux in the wrong. No doubt the Lorilleux were quite quiet respectable people, working all the blessed day, punctual with their rent; but, in truth, they were madly jealous. Besides, they were regular skinflints, shabby creatures who covered up their bottles of wine as they went up, so as not to be obliged to offer them a glass; really, they were too bad. One day, as Gervaise was standing the Boches some cassis with seltzer, and they were drinking it in the lodge, Madame Lorilleux went by stiffly, affecting to spit before the *concierge's* door. Since that time, when Madame Boche swept out the staircase and the passages, she left the dust-heap outside the Lorilleux's door.

"Ah!" cried Madame Lorilleux, "the Clop-clop stuffs them, the gluttons! Nice people they are, indeed! They'd better look out! I'll complain to the landlord. Only yesterday I saw that artful old Boche making up to Madame Gaudron. To go for a woman of that age, a woman who has had half a dozen children, I call that sheer beastliness! Let them serve me another dirty trick like that, and I'll just go and tell Mother Boche; won't she give her man a nice dressing! Lord! it would be quite a joke!"

Old Madame Coupeau saw both households continually, agreeing with everybody all round, getting invited to dinner all the oftener because she listened

indulgently to her daughter and her daughter-in-law, one one evening, one another. Madame Lerat for the moment did not go near the Coupeaus because she had had a quarrel with the Clop-clop on the subject of a Zouave who had cut off his mother's nose with a razor. She defended the Zouave; the razor-cut seemed to her very loving indeed, she would not say why. And she had added yet more to the wrath of Madame Lorilleux by declaring that the Clop-clop, in conversation, before everybody, spoke of her quite naturally as Pig-tail. All the people, the Boches, the neighbours, now called her Pig-tail.

In the midst of all these disturbances Gervaise would come to the door of her shop, quiet and composed, with a little friendly nod for her friends as they went by. It delighted her to go out there for just a minute, in the midst of her work, and look down the street with all the pride and vanity of a woman of business who has a bit of the pavement to herself. The Rue de la Goutte-d'Or was all hers, and the streets near by, and the whole neighbourhood. When she leaned out in her white bodice, with her bare arms, her blonde hair ruffled with the work, she could look from end to end of the street, right and left, taking in at a glance people and houses, street and sky. On the left the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or dwindled away, peaceful and deserted, into quite a bit of country, where the women chatted to one another on their doorsteps; on the right, a few yards distant, the Rue des Poissonniers was noisy with vehicles and the tramp of men, making this end of the street a general meeting-place for all the streets round about.

Gervaise loved the street, with its trucks jolting over the ups and downs of the road, its cram of people along the narrow pavements, interrupted by the sharp descent of the irregular pavement. Her three inches of gutter before the shop took an immense importance in her eyes, a very river, which she wished to keep clean and tidy, a strange and living river, to which the dyer's colours gave all sorts of delicate variations in the midst of the mud of the street. She took an interest, too, in the other shops; a big grocer's, with its spread of dried fruits hung up with string; a cheap draper's, where jackets and blue blouses, their arms standing out stiff, swayed at the least puff of wind. Inside the fruiterer's and the tripe-seller's, she could see just a bit of the counter, with their fine peaceful cats stretched out at length. Her neighbour, Madame Vigouroux, the coal dealer, was on nodding acquaintance with her; she was a little plump, dark, bright-eyed woman, always dawdling about with men in front of her shop, which was ornamented with a complicated design of a rustic châlet, painted on logs of reddish-brown colour. Mesdames Cudorge, mother and daughter, her other neighbours, at the umbrella-shop, never shewed themselves outside their gloomy window, their closed door, embellished with two little zinc parasols coated with a thick layer of bright vermilion. But Gervaise, before going in again, always gave a glance across the road opposite, to a great white wall, without a window, with only a huge doorway, through which could be seen the blaze of a forge, inside a court strewed with carts and waggons, their shafts in the

air. On the wall the word "Farrier" was painted in large letters, surrounded by a fan of horse-shoes. All day long the hammers rang on the anvils, and a shower of sparks lit up the shade of the court. And at the end of this wall, up a passage not bigger than a cupboard, between a seller of old iron and a vendor of fried potatoes, there was a watchmaker, a spruce frock-coated gentleman, who fumbled away at watches all his time with little tiny tools, before a shop-board with dainty things under glass cases; whilst, behind him, the pendulums of two or three dozen little clocks ticked all at once, in the dirt and squalor of the street and the rhythmical clatter of the smithy.

The neighbours found Gervaise very pleasant. No doubt there was some talk against her, but they were all of one account in admitting that she had large eyes, a mouth no bigger than that, with very white teeth. She was certainly a pretty blonde, and would have been extremely pretty but for her limp. She was in her twenty-eighth year; she had grown stouter. Her sharp features rounded out; her movements were somewhat more deliberate. She would sometimes sit absent-mindedly on the edge of a chair, while she was waiting for her iron to heat, her face drowned in a sort of animal delight. She was getting fond of good things to eat; in that everybody agreed, but it was not a bad fault, quite the contrary. When you have the income to pay for delicacies, it would be silly indeed to eat potato-peel. All the more so, as she always worked hard, slaving at her business, and going on late into the night, with closed shutters,

when there was anything urgent. As the neighbours said, she had luck; everything succeeded in her hands. She washed for the house, for M. Madinier, Mademoiselle Remanjou, the Boches; she even carried away some customers from her former mistress, Madame Fauconnier, town ladies, living in the Rue du Faubourg-Poissonnière. At the end of the second fortnight she was obliged to take in two work-women, Madame Putois, and the tall Clémence, the girl who lived on the sixth floor; that made three people about, besides her apprentice, that little cross-eyed slip of an Augustine, who was as ugly as sin. Some people would have had their heads quite turned by such luck. It was very excusable if she let the work slide a bit on Monday, after slaving away all the week. Indeed, she was bound to; it would have made her quite silly to go on doing nothing but look at shirts being ironed, if she were not to go in for something good now and then when her mouth watered for it.

Never had Gervaise shewn herself so amiable to everybody. She was as meek as a lamb, as sweet as sugar. Apart from Madame Lorilleux, whom she called Pig-tail in order to pay her out, she hated no one; she was indulgent to everybody. Letting herself go a bit, after she had had a good meal and her coffee, she professed a vague, general benevolence. Her saying was, "Oughtn't we to put up with one another, if we are not to live like savages?" When anyone said, "How good you are!" she only laughed. She might just as well have been unamiable. She denied that there was any merit in her good-nature. Had

not all her dreams been realized? Had she anything to wish for? She recalled her old ideal when she was in destitution: to get work, have bread to eat, a hole and corner of her own, bring up her children, not get knocked about, and die in her bed. Now her ideal was already surpassed; she had all she had wished for, and more. As for dying in her bed, she said laughingly she quite counted on that, but not just yet, you may be sure.

Gervaise was specially good to Coupeau. Never an unkind word, never a complaint behind his back. The zinc-worker had finally gone back to his work, and as his workshop was now at the other end of Paris, she gave him every morning forty sous for his *déjeuner*, his drop of drink, and his tobacco. Only, two days out of six, Coupeau stopped on the way, drank his forty sous with a friend, and came home for *déjeuner* with some tale or other. On one occasion he did not get far; he treated himself, Mes-Bottes, and three other friends, to a fine spread—snails, a joint, and good wine, at the "Capucin," Barrière de la Chapelle. Then, as his forty sous was not enough, he sent the bill to his wife by the waiter, saying that he was stone-broke. She laughed and shrugged her shoulders. What was the harm if her man amused himself a bit? You must give men their run, if you want to get on happily together. From one thing to another one might soon come to blows. Good Lord! it was easy enough to understand. Coupeau still suffered in his leg; he had let himself be persuaded; he had to do as others did, if he were not to pass for a muff. Besides, it was nothing

very serious ; if he came in a bit screwed he lay down, and was all right two hours after.

By this time they had come to the heat of the summer. One June afternoon, a Saturday when they were extra busy, Gervaise herself stuffed the coke into the stove, around which the ten irons were set to heat, while the flue was roaring above. At this hour the sun poured down on the front of the shop; the pavement cast up a very blaze of light and heat, setting great motes a-dance on the ceiling ; and this flood of light, a little blue in the shadow of the paper on shelves and window, threw a blinding brightness on the shop-board, like a cloud of gold-dust sifted all over the fine linen. The heat was intolerable. The door was wide open, but not a breath of air entered; the things hung up on wires to dry, steamed, and were as dry as shavings in less than three-quarters of an hour. For a little while, in this furnace-like heat, there had been a heavy silence, in which the irons sounded bluntly, dulled by the thick ironing-blanket covered with calico.

"Well!" said Gervaise, "if we don't melt to-day! One could take off one's chemise!"

She was kneeling on the ground before an earthenware pan, dipping the linen in the starch. She was in her white petticoat, with her bodice turned up at the sleeves and open at the neck, her arms and neck bare, all over rosy, and so covered with sweat that her little blonde fluffs of hair stuck to the skin. She carefully dipped caps, shirt-fronts, petticoats, and the embroidery on the drawers, into the milky water. Then she rolled them up, one after

another, and laid them at the bottom of a square basket, after having sprinkled water with her hand over the parts of the shirts and drawers that had not been starched.

"This basket is for you, Madame Putois," she went on. "Be quick, please. It will dry at once; you must do it over again in an hour's time."

Madame Putois, a little, lean woman of forty-five, ironed away without a drop of sweat, buttoned up in an old brown dress. She had not even taken off her bonnet, a black bonnet trimmed with green ribbons, turning yellow. She stood upright before the shop-board, which was too tall for her, her elbows raised, moving her irons with the jerky movement of a marionette. All at once she cried,—

"Now, now, Mademoiselle Clémence, put on your bodice. It's indecent. While you are about it, you'd better shew all your shop. There are three men stopping opposite to look."

The big Clémence called her an old silly, between her teeth. She was suffocating; she only wanted to be as comfortable as she could; everybody hadn't the skin of a rhinoceros. Besides, what did it matter if people saw anything? And she threw up her arms, her fine, firm bust nearly coming out of her chemise, her shoulders dragging at the short sleeves. Clémence was going on at such a rate that she threatened to use herself up before she was thirty; the day after she had been out on the loose she was always on the move; she seemed to work in her sleep, as if her head were stuffed with sawdust. But she was kept on, all the same; there was not a

single work-woman who could iron a man's shirt-front with such skill. That was her speciality, men's shirts.

"It's my business anyway," she declared, slapping her chest. "And it doesn't do you any harm."

"Clémence, put on your bodice," said Gervaise. "Madame Putois is right; it is not decent. People will take my house for what it is not."

Clémence grumblingly obeyed. Fiddlesticks! as if nobody had ever seen titties before! And she vented her wrath on the apprentice, the cross-eyed slip of an Augustine, who stood beside her, ironing the plain part of the linen, the stockings and handkerchiefs; she hustled her, and jogged her with her elbow. But Augustine, with the sly and peevish malevolence of a laughing-stock and an abortion, spat on her dress behind, without anyone's seeing it, to pay her out.

Gervaise was just beginning a cap belonging to Madame Boche, which she wanted to be particular about. She had made fresh starch so as to freshen it up again. And she was gently working the *polonais*, a little iron rounded at both ends, to and fro in the cap, when a woman entered, a meagre woman with great red spots in her cheeks, her skirts sopping. It was a washerwoman who employed three workwomen at the wash-house in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or.

"You have come too soon, Madame Bijard," cried Gervaise. "I told you this evening. It is very tiresome of you to come at this hour of the day."

But as the washerwoman lamented, declaring she was afraid she couldn't set the wash going that

day, Gervaise promised to give her the dirty clothes at once. They went for the bundles into the room on the left, Etienne's room, and came back with great armfuls, which they heaped up on the floor at the back of the shop. The sorting took a good half-hour. Gervaise made heaps all around her, putting together the shirts, the chemises, the handkerchiefs, the socks, the dusters. When she came upon anything belonging to a new customer, she marked it with a cross in red thread, so as to recognize it. A dull stench rose into the hot air out of all this dirty linen.

"Oh, I say, that does hum!" said Clémence, stopping up her nose.

"Well, if it was clean, would they send it to us?" said Gervaise, composedly. "All the better for us! We said fourteen chemises, didn't we, Madame Bijard?—fifteen, sixteen, seventeen——"

She went on counting out aloud. She felt no disgust; she was quite used to it; and she thrust her bare, rosy arms into the heaps of shirts yellowed with dirt, dusters stiffened with the grease of dish-washing, socks eaten away with sweat. Nevertheless, the strong odour that mounted to her nostrils from the pile of clothes before her gave her a feeling of drowsiness. She sat down on the edge of a stool, half doubled up, reaching out her hands mechanically to right and left, slowly, as if intoxicated by this odour of humanity, a vague smile on her face, her eyelids drooping; and an incipient laziness seemed to come over her so, in this asphyxia of old clothes that poisoned the air about her.

Just as she was shaking out a child's diaper, so messed up that she could not recognize it, Coupeau entered.

"This blasted sun!" he stuttered. "It bowls you clean over."

The zinc-worker held on to the ironing-board to keep himself from falling. It was the first time that he had brought home quite such a heavy load. Up till then he had only been a bit boozed, nothing more. But this time he had his eye blacked, a chance blow in a friendly scuffle. His curly head, in which the white hairs were already beginning to shew, seemed to have been propping up the wall in some low wine-shop, for a cobweb hung from a lock of hair at the back of the neck. He was still as jolly as ever, his features a little bit drawn and worn, but always good-tempered, as he said, and his complexion still enough to put a duchess to shame.

"I must explain," he said, addressing Gervaise. "It was Pied-de-Céleri; you know him, the chap with a wooden leg. Well, he is just leaving to go home, and he wanted to have a bust-up. Oh, it finished us up, that beastly sun! The whole street is sick. Lord! they're staggering all over the place."

And as Clémence began to laugh at the idea of all the street being tipsy, he was seized with a hilarity which nearly choked him. He cried,—

"Ha! ha! the damned sots! Isn't it funny? But it isn't their fault; it's the sun."

The whole laundry was convulsed with laughter, even Madame Putois, who disapproved of drink. The cross-eyed Augustine crowed like a cock, her mouth

wide open, in convulsions. Gervaise had an idea that Coupeau had not come straight home, but had been spending an hour at the Lorilleux's, where they put all sorts of bad notions into his head. He swore that he had not been there, and she, too, laughed indulgently, not even scolding him for having lost another day's work.

"What things he says! Lord! Lord!" she murmured, "how can one say such things?"

Then, in a motherly tone,—

"Better go and lie down. You see we are busy; you are in the way. That makes thirty-two handkerchiefs, Madame Bijard; and two more, thirty-four."

But Coupeau was not sleepy. He stood there, swaying to and fro like a pendulum, sniggering in a persistent, teasing sort of way. Gervaise, wanting to get rid of Madame Bijard, called Clémence over to count the clothes while she made the list. Thereupon the cheeky beggar had her say, some dirty word or other, over each article; she laid bare all the misfortunes and all the misconduct of the customers, joking over all the holes and all the stains that passed through her hands. Augustine pretended not to understand, opening her ears to their widest, with a premature taste for vice. Madame Putois pursed up her lips; it did not seem to her the thing to say all that before Coupeau; a man has no business to see the dirty clothes; proper sort of people never do that sort of thing. As for Gervaise, absorbed in her work, she seemed not to hear. As she made out the list, she looked at each article carefully, to see who it

belonged to; and she never made a mistake, assigning each to its proper owner, from its look, its colour. Those towels belonged to the Goujets; it was evident that they had not been used to wipe out the stove. There was a pillow-case which certainly came from the Boche's, on account of the pomade with which Madame Boche plastered all her linen. One need not look closely, either, at M. Madinier's flannel vests; he turned the colour of the stuff, his skin was so greasy. And she knew other particularities, all about the cleanliness of everyone, the under-garments of the neighbours who sported their silk dresses in the streets, and how many stockings, handkerchiefs, and chemises they dirtied in a week, and the rents that some people got in certain things, always in the same spot. She was full of anecdotes. Mademoiselle Remanjou's chemises, for instance, gave rise to endless comments; they wore out at the top, the old maid must have very sharp shoulder-blades; and they were never soiled, not if she had worn them for a fortnight, which proved that at her age one is as dry as a faggot. So, at every sorting, the whole neighbourhood of the Goutte-d'Or was taken to pieces in the shop.

"Here are some goody-goodies!" cried Clémence, opening a fresh bundle.

Gervaise, suddenly seized with a great repugnance, drew back.

"Madame Gaudron's bundle," she said. "I won't wash it any more; I only want to find an excuse. No, I am not more particular than other people. I have turned over very nasty linen in my life; but as for that—no, I really can't. It nearly makes me

sick. What does the woman do, to get her linen in such a state ? "

And she begged Clémence to hurry on. But the work-woman continued her remarks, stuck her finger into the holes, referring to every article, which she flourished in the air like banners of triumphant filth. Meanwhile, the pile increased all round Gervaise. Now, still sitting on the stool, she was almost lost to sight in the midst of all the shirts and petticoats ; before her were sheets, drawers, table-cloths, a very confusion of dirtiness ; and there, in the midst of this rising flood, she sat with her bare arms and neck, her fluffs of blonde hair sticking to her temples, rosier and drowsier than ever. She had recovered her air of composure, her careful and attentive smile, forgetting Madame Gaudron's linen, not smelling it any more, turning over the heap with one hand to see if there was any mistake. The sun slanted through the doorway; the shop was a blaze of heat. Coupeau, the heat of the place getting more and more into his head, was seized with a sudden tenderness. He came towards Gervaise with open arms, very affectionately.

" You're a dear, good woman," he stuttered. " I must give you a kiss."

But he caught his feet in the petticoats which were in the way, and nearly fell.

" What a nuisance you are," said Gervaise, without shewing any annoyance. " Be quiet, we have finished now."

No; he must give her a kiss, he must, he loved her dearly. As he stammered out these phrases, he made his way round the heap of petticoats, stumbled

against the heap of shirts, and then, still pushing his way on, his foot caught, and he fell flat on the heap of dusters. Gervaise, beginning to get angry, pushed him away, declaring he would get everything mixed up. But Clémence, and even Madame Putois, found fault with her. After all, it was nice of him to want to give her a kiss. She might as well have let him do it.

"You are lucky, Madame Coupeau," said Madame Bijard, whom her husband, a locksmith, was accustomed to batter about whenever he came home. "If mine was like that when he has had a drop too much, it would be a blessed thing!"

Gervaise, recovering herself, was already sorry for her impatience. She helped Coupeau up again, and held out her cheek to him with a smile. But the zinc-worker, without minding the people about, took hold of her breasts.

"I don't want to say it," he murmured, "but your linen does jolly well stink! But I love you all the same, you know."

"Let me go, you are tickling me!" she cried, laughing more than ever. "You silly thing! How can you be so silly?"

He had seized hold of her, and would not let her go. She gave way, overcome with a sort of dizziness that came to her from the pile of clothes, without minding the liquorish breath of Coupeau. And the great kiss that they exchanged, mouth to mouth, in the midst of the dirty things, was like a first step in the slow, downward course of their life.

Meanwhile Madame Bijard tied up the clothes

in bundles. She spoke of her little girl, Eulalie, now two years old, who was already as wise as a little woman. One could leave her all by herself; she never cried, or played with matches. Finally she carried off the bundles one after another, stooping under the heavy weight, her face growing purple with the exertion.

"It is unbearable; we are simply roasting," said Gervaise, wiping her face before returning to work on Madame Boche's cap.

And she had a good mind to box Augustine's ears when she saw that the stove was red-hot, and the very irons as well. She was a little devil; if you merely turned your back, she was up to some mischief. Now one had to wait a quarter of an hour before it was possible to use the irons. Gervaise covered down the fire with two shovels full of ashes. It also occurred to her to hang a pair of sheets on the wires along the ceiling like blinds, so as to take off some of the sun. Then it was quite tolerable inside. The temperature was still pretty strong; but it was like being in an alcove, with a white light, all by one's self; for all that, the footsteps outside could still be heard, on the other side of the sheets; and now one could do just as one pleased. Clémence took off her bodice. As Coupeau refused to go and lie down, he was allowed to remain; but he had to promise to keep quiet in the corner, for they couldn't afford to rest on their oars just then.

"What has that little wretch done with the *polonais?*" muttered Gervaise, referring to Augustine.

They were always looking for the little iron,

which they found in all sorts of odd places, where the apprentice was supposed to have hidden it away maliciously. Gervaise was at last finishing Madame Boche's cap. She had roughed out the lace, drawing it apart with her hand, setting it up with a little touch of the iron. It was a cap with very elaborate puffs, separated by insertions of embroidery. She stuck at the work, silent and attentive, ironing the puffs and insertions with the cock, an egg-shaped instrument fitted into a wooden holder.

Silence reigned in the place. Nothing was heard but the dull thud of the irons, deadened by the ironing-blanket. On both sides of the great square table, the mistress, the two work-women, and the apprentice, all leaned over their work, their shoulders rounded, their arms working to and fro incessantly. Each had a flat brick on her right, burnt by the hot irons. In the middle of the table, on the edge of a deep plate filled with cold water, was a rag and a little brush. A bunch of great lilies stood in an old bottle of cherry brandy, bringing a sumptuous bit of garden into the place, with its large snowy clusters. Madame Putois had set to work on the basket of linen prepared by Gervaise, towels, drawers, bodices, and cuffs. Augustine dawdled over her stockings and towels, gazing into the air, absorbed in a big moth that was fluttering about. As for Clémence, she was just doing her thirty-fifth shirt since the morning.

"Always wine, never spirits!" said the zinc-worker suddenly, as if he were obliged to make the declaration. "Spirits knock me up, no mistake."

Clémence took an iron from the stove with her leathern holder, and put it up to her face to see if it was hot enough. She rubbed it on the brick, wiped it on a cloth attached to her waist, and attacked her thirty-fifth shirt, first ironing the body and the two sleeves.

"Bah! Monsieur Coupeau," she said, after a minute, "a little glass of French cream isn't so bad. It suits me jolly well. Then, you know, the sooner one kicks the bucket the better. I know very well I shan't make old bones."

"How horrid you are with your graveyard notions!" broke in Madame Putois, who disliked gloomy conversations.

Coupeau got up angrily, fancying that he was being accused of having drunk brandy. He swore on his life, on the life of his wife and child, that he had not a drop of brandy in his body. And he went up to Clémence, breathing in her face so that she could verify it. Then, with her bare shoulders right under his nose, he began to snigger. He wanted a look. Clémence, after having folded the back of the shirt and ironed over the two sides, was at work on the wrists and collar. But as he shoved up against her he made her make a wrinkle, and she had to take the brush from the plate in order to smooth out the starch.

"Madame!" said she, "keep him off me, will you!"

"Leave her alone; you can't behave," said Gervaise, composedly. "We are busy, can't you see?"

Well, what if they were busy? it wasn't his fault. He wasn't doing any harm. He didn't touch; he only looked. Wasn't one to be allowed to look at the nice things that God Almighty had made? She had damned good arms, any way, this rip of a Clémence. She might shew herself for two sous, and let people feel her; no one would regret his money. The work-woman meanwhile made no objections, only laughing at his boozy compliments. And she began to joke with him. He bantered her about her men's shirts. She was always at men's shirts. Why, yes! she lived with them, damn it all! She knew them jolly well. She knew how they were made. They had passed through her hands in hundreds and hundreds. All the fellows in the neighbourhood carried about her work on them. And she went on shaking her shoulders with laughter; she had marked five large folds down the length of the back, inserting the iron through the opening of the front; then she turned down the front flap and worked it into large folds in the same way.

"That's the flag!" she said, laughing louder than ever.

The cross-eyed Augustine broke into a splutter of laughter, so funny did the word strike her. She got a scolding: brats like her had no business to laugh at what they shouldn't understand. Clémence handed her her iron; the apprentice finished off the irons on her dusters and stockings, when they were not hot enough for the starched things. But she took hold of it so clumsily that she burnt herself all down the wrist. She began to sob, accusing

Clémence of having burnt her on purpose. The work-woman, who had just fetched a very hot iron for the shirt-front, consoled her by threatening to iron her two ears for her, if she said any more. Meanwhile, she had stuck a cloth under the shirt-front, and she moved the iron slowly over it, leaving time for the starch to soak out and dry. The shirt-front came out as stiff and shining as a sheet of thick paper.

"Damnation!" cried Coupeau, shifting from foot to foot behind her, with a drunkard's obstinacy.

He raised himself on tip-toe, with a hoarse laugh like a rusty pulley. Clémence, leaning heavily on the board, her wrists bent, her elbows up in the air and wide apart, bent her neck in a great effort; and all her bare flesh swelled out, her shoulders heaved up, the tension of the muscles setting the fine skin palpitating, her chest rose, pearled with perspiration, in the rosy shadow of the half-open chemise. He put out his hands, trying to touch.

"Madame, Madame," cried Clémence, "make him leave off, do! I shall go if you don't stop him. I won't be insulted."

Gervaise had just placed Madame Boche's cap on a head-block covered with a cloth, and was working out the lace minutely with the small iron. She raised her eyes just as the zinc-worker reached out his hands, fumbling at the chemise.

"Really, Coupeau, you can't behave yourself," she said with a bored air, as if she were scolding a child who would insist on eating jam without bread. "You just come to bed."

"Yes, you be off to bed, Monsieur Coupeau. You'll be much better off there," said Madame Putois.

"All right," he stammered, still sniggering away; "you're as cracked as the rest of them. Can't one have a little joke, then? Women, I know all about women; I've never done any harm. One fools about a bit, but one doesn't go any further; it is simply a compliment to the sex. And then, when you put out all your goods, why shouldn't one take his choice? Why does the creature shew all she's got? No, it's not fair."

Then, turning to Clémence,—

"You know, ducky, you needn't be grumptious. If it is because there are people about——"

He got no further. Gervaise, without violence, took hold of him with one hand and laid the other over his mouth. He struggled, by way of joke, while she pushed him out through the shop into the bedroom. He got his mouth free, and declared that he was quite ready to go to bed, but that the girl was to come and warm his tootsies. Then Gervaise could be heard taking off his shoes. She undressed him, scolding him a bit in a maternal way. When she pulled at his trousers he roared with laughter, sprawling out on the bed; and he kicked, declaring she was tickling him. At last she covered him up carefully, like a child. Was he all right now? He did not reply; he called out to Clémence,—

"I say, ducky, here I am; I'm waiting for you."

As Gervaise returned to the shop, the cross-eyed Augustine was just having her ears boxed by Clémence. It was on account of a dirty iron, which

Madame Putois had taken off the stove; not suspecting anything, she had smutted a whole shirt; and as Clémence, in order to redeem herself from the charge of not having cleaned her iron, swore loudly that the iron was not hers, despite the patch of burnt starch underneath it, the apprentice had spat on her dress, openly, before her, furious at the injustice. This brought on her a good sounding smack. The cross-eyed chit kept back her tears, cleaned the iron, scratching it, then wiping it, after having rubbed it over with a candle-end; but every time that she passed behind Clémence, she kept her saliva, and spat it out, laughing inwardly as it slobbered down over the skirt.

Gervaise returned to her task of plaiting out the lace of the cap. And in the sudden calm one could hear the thick voice of Coupeau from the back of the shop. He was still good-tempered, laughed all by himself, letting some disconnected phrases escape him.

"My wife is silly! Isn't she silly to send me to bed? Eh, it's too silly, in the middle of the day, when one isn't even dozy."

Then all at once he began to snore. At that Gervaise heaved a sigh of relief, happy to know he was at last quiet, sleeping off his boozification, safe in bed. And she spoke in the silence with a slow, continuous voice, without taking her eyes off the little plaiting-iron which she manipulated briskly.

"What would you have? He doesn't know what he is doing; it's no use being angry. If I were to be always blowing him up, it would do no good. I

prefer to say as he says, and get him off to bed; then it's all done with, and I'm in peace and quiet. Then he means no harm, he's very fond of me. You saw, just now, he would have gone through fire and water to give me a kiss. It's very nice of him, for there are a pretty lot of them who go off after women as soon as they've drunk a drop. He comes straight back home. He fools about a bit with the work-women, but it doesn't go further than that. You understand, Clémence, you mustn't be offended. You know what a man is when he is tipsy; if he were to kill his father and mother, he wouldn't remember anything about it. Oh! I forgive him with all my heart. He is only like the rest of them, sure enough."

She said it all composedly, without anger or revolt, already quite used to Coupeau's boozy exploits; still making excuses for him, but already seeing no harm in his fooling about with the girls in her presence. When she had ended there was again silence, which remained unbroken. Madame Putois, as she took each article, pulled out the basket from under the crétonne with which the table was draped. Then, when it was ironed, she lifted up her short arms and laid it on a shelf. Clémence was finishing off her thirty-fifth shirt. They were crowded with work; they had calculated that it would be needful to go on till eleven, working as hard as ever they could. All the workshop, now undistracted, went at it like grim death. Bare arms went and came, lighting up the whiteness of the linen with their rosy shadows. The stove was again filled with coke, and as the sun,

striking through an opening between the sheets, fell right upon it, the intense heat could be seen rising in the air on the ray of sunlight, an invisible flame, which seemed to shiver in the air.

It grew so stifling, with all those petticoats and table-cloths drying on the lines, that the cross-eyed Augustine, unable to find any more saliva, stuck the end of her tongue out between her lips. There was an odour of furnace, of starch, of burnt iron, the insipid odour of a bath-room, to which the four workwomen added the sharper savour of their sopping necks and chignons, whilst the bunch of great lilies, in the green water of its bottle, withered away, exhaling a pure, strong perfume. And, from time to time, in the midst of the noise of irons and of the poker stirring the fire, a snore of Coupeau sounded out, with the regularity of a loud clock ticking, keeping time with the women's unceasing labour.

After a day's hard drinking, the zinc-worker always had a headache, a terrible headache which put his hair out of curl, his nose out of joint, and his mouth out of taste, for the whole of the next day. He rose late, slept till eight o'clock; and he dawdled about the shop, unable to make up his mind to set out for the yard. The day was by this time lost. In the morning he complained that his pins felt like cotton-wool, declared that it was too idiotic to go on the booze like that; it simply did for you. It was merely that one came across a set of sots, who wouldn't let you be; one swilled a bit, without intending to; one got into one sort of affair or another, and finally one got a bit elevated, and there you were! The devil!

it wouldn't occur again; he didn't mean to leave his boots at the bar, in the flower of his age. But after *déjeuner* he put on his tidy things, and began to hum and haw, to shew he was in good voice. He began to deny that he had been drunk the night before, a bit "on," perhaps. There weren't many of his make, sound as a bell, with a wrist like iron, drinking as hard as he liked without being any the worse for it. Then he mooned about the street all the afternoon. When he had worried the work-women beyond endurance, his wife gave him twenty sous, to rid the place of him.

He set off at once, and went to buy his tobacco at the "Petite Civette," Rue des Poissonniers, where he generally had a prune, if he chanced to meet anybody that he knew. Then he used up the rest of the change at Francois', at the corner of the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, where there was a delightful wine, a young wine, that tickled your palate. It was an old-fashioned pot-house, dark, low-ceilinged, with a smoky room at the right, in which soup was sold. And he stayed on there till the evening, drinking glass after glass; he had tick there, and the landlord had solemnly promised not to send in the bill to his good woman. One had to rinse out one's mouth a bit, obviously, to get rid of the bad taste of the day before. One glass of wine leads to another. He was all right, he was; didn't run after girls, though he liked a bit of a joke now and then, certainly; got a bit top-heavy now and then, but decently, not like those beastly chaps who were always in liquor. And he went home gay as a lark.

"Has your sweetheart been in?" he would sometimes ask Gervaise, banteringly. "We never see him now; I must go and fetch him."

The sweetheart was Goujet. He was careful, indeed, not to come too often, for fear of being in the way, and causing talk. Nevertheless, he seized on all sorts of pretexts, brought the linen, passed twenty times a day. There was a particular corner in the laundry, at the back, where he liked to sit for hours without moving, smoking his short pipe. In the evening, after dinner, once every ten days or so, he ventured in and installed himself; and he never talked, sat with his mouth sealed, his eyes fixed on Gervaise, only taking his pipe from his lips to laugh when she said anything. When the laundry was at work late on Saturdays, he sat there absorbed, seeming to find it as amusing as the theatre. Sometimes they went on till three o'clock in the morning. A lamp was suspended from the ceiling by a wire; the shade cast a great circle of light, in which the linen took the soft whiteness of snow. The apprentice put up the shutters; but as the July nights were broiling, the street-door was left open. As the hours went by, the women undid button after button of their dresses, to get a little air. Their fine skin turned golden under the light of the lamp, that of Gervaise in particular. She was plump now, her shoulders blonde, shining as silk, with a little wrinkle like a baby's at the neck; he could have drawn that dimple from memory, so well he knew it. Gradually he was overcome by the heat of the stove, the smell of the linen steaming under the irons; and he half dozed in a sort of vague dream

Chapter V

The sweetheart was Goujet. He was careful, indeed, not to come too often, for fear of being in the way, and causing talk. Nevertheless, he seized on all sorts of pretexts, brought the linen, passed twenty times a day. There was a particular corner in the laundry, at the back, where he liked to sit for hours without moving, smoking his short pipe.

as he watched the women pushing on with their work, moving their bare arms to and fro, working deep into the night, that the neighbours might have their Sunday things. All round the laundry the houses slept; a deep and slumberous silence fell heavily on all around. Twelve struck, then one, then two. In the black deserted street the doorway cast a single streak of light, like a roll of yellow cloth on the ground. From time to time a distant footstep was heard, a man approached, and as he crossed the streak of light he turned, surprised by the sound of the irons, getting a glimpse of bare-necked women in a reddish mist.

Goujet, seeing that Gervaise did not know what to do with Étienne, and wishing to get him out of the way of Coupeau, had taken him to blow the bellows at his forge in the bolt factory. The nail-making trade—if it was not very grand in itself, what with the dirt of the forges, and the tediousness of always hammering away at the same piece of iron—was a trade which brought in money, ten or twelve francs a day. The youngster, who was now twelve, could soon get into it if the work suited him. And Étienne was now another link between the laundress and the blacksmith, He would bring the boy home, telling how well he had been getting on. Everybody joked Gervaise about Goujet, declaring he was quite mashed on her. She was well aware of it, she blushed like a child, and her cheeks went as red as a biffen apple. Poor dear fellow, he was never in the way. Never had he said anything to her; never a smutty word or a familiarity. There were not many men

like that. And, without ever confessing it, she was filled with joy at being loved like this, like a holy virgin. When she had any serious trouble, she thought of the blacksmith; and that consoled her. When they were alone together, they were quite at their ease; they smiled contentedly in one another's faces, without putting their feelings into words. It was a sober sort of affection, without a thought of anything wrong, since it was better far to live in peace and quietness when one could be happy that way, simply by living so.

Meanwhile, Nana, towards the end of the summer, began to put things in the house upside down. She was six, and a regular little terror. Her mother took her every morning, so as not to have her always in the way, to a little school in the Rue Polonceau, Mademoiselle Josse's. She pinned her schoolfellows' dresses together at the back; she filled the schoolmistress' snuff-box with ashes; she was up to other tricks, dirtier still, which were not to be repeated. Twice had Mademoiselle Josse turned her away, and twice had she taken her back, so as not to lose the six francs a month. After school-hours, Nana made up for having been shut up so long by kicking up an infernal row under the porch and in the court, where the work-women, half-deafened with her noise, sent her to play. There she found Pauline, the Boche's little girl, and Victor, a great lout of ten, the child of Gervaise's old mistress, who loved to trot about with quite little girls. Madame Fauconnier, who had remained on good terms with the Coupeaus, sent the child herself.

Besides, there was an extraordinary swarm of children in the house, a bevy of urchins rushing up and down the long staircases all day long, like flocks of noisy, pilfering sparrows. Madame Gaudron alone was responsible for nine, some light, some dark, all with uncombed hair and unwashed faces, their trousers up to their eyes, their socks rolling down over their shoes, their jackets in rags, bits of white skin shewing through all the filth. Another woman, a bread-carrier on the fifth floor, had seven. There were lots in every room. And in all this crowd of rosy-cheeked urchins, whose faces were washed, at all events, whenever it rained, there were big ones, tricky, some of them, some of them fat as little old men ; little ones, quite tiny, only just out of the cradle, hardly able to use their legs, going on all fours when they wanted to run. Nana reigned over all the kids, ruling with a rod of iron over girls twice as big as herself, only delegating a little of her authority to Pauline and Victor, who were her sworn allies, and did whatever she told them. The little devil was for ever playing at mother, undressing the smallest ones and dressing them again, wanting to examine the others all over, pulling them about, and exercising the fantastic despotism of a vicious grown-up person. Under her leadership they were always up to mischief. The band paddled in the dyer's stream, and came out blue or red to the knees ; then rushed off to the blacksmith's, where it prigged nails and iron-filings ; and then went on to sprawl on the carpenter's shavings, huge heaps of shavings, full of fun, in which one

could roll over and over, petticoats in the air. The court, too, belonged to it; it resounded with the clatter of little shoes going hurry-skurry, the shrieks which went up every time the flock took flight. On certain days the court was not sufficient. Then the band made for the cellars, then up again, up one staircase, along a passage, down another staircase, then along another passage, without ever getting tired, for hours together, yelling all the time, shaking the great house with the rush of wild beasts let loose from every corner.

"They are a nuisance, those little wretches," cried Madame Boche. "Really, people must have very little to do to have so many children. And yet they are always complaining of being hard up."

Boche declared that children sprang from poverty like toadstools from a dunghill. The *concierge* was after them all day, threatening them with her broom. At last she fastened up the door leading to the cellars, for she found out from Pauline, to whom she gave a good box on the ears, that Nana had taken it into her head to play at doctor, down below in the dark; the vicious little rascal gave clysters to the others with sticks.

One afternoon there was an awful scene; it was bound to come sooner or later. Nana had hit on a very amusing game. She had stolen away one of Madame Boche's sabots from before the lodge, tied on a string to it, and set to dragging it about like a carriage. On his part, Victor had filled the sabot with apple-parings. Then a procession was formed. Nana walked at the head, dragging the sabot. Pauline and

Victor supported her to right and left. Then the whole string of urchins followed in order, the big ones first, the little ones after, all shoving one another about; a baby in petticoats no bigger than a doll, with a bonnet all over one ear, came last. And the procession chanted something melancholy, with "ohs" and "ahs." Nana had said they were going to play at funeral; the apple-parings were the dead person. When they had been once round the court they began again. They found it highly amusing.

"What are they up to?" murmured Madame Boche, coming out of her lodge to have a look, always suspicious of some fresh mischief.

When she saw what it was,—"Why, it's my sabot!" she cried furiously. "Oh, the little blackguards!"

She slapped their heads right and left, boxed Nana's both ears, and gave Pauline a kick, the great goose, letting her mother's sabot be knocked about. Gervaise was just then filling a pail at the tap. When she saw Nana bleeding at the nose, sobbing loudly, she nearly flew in the *concierge's* face. Did she think children were to be banged about as if they were oxen? One must be hard-hearted to do that—oh! the lowest of the low. Naturally, Madame Boche answered her back. When one had such a disgrace of a child as that, one ought to keep her under lock and key. At last Boche himself came to the door of the lodge, and called to his wife to come in, and not stand discussing things with low people. It was a regular downright quarrel.

As a matter of fact, the Boches and the

Coupeaus had not been getting on very well together for the last month. Gervaise, naturally of a very liberal disposition, was always giving away bottles of wine, cups of broth, oranges, and pieces of cake. One evening, she left at the lodge the remains of a salad of beetroot and dandelion, knowing that the *concierge* would have sold herself for salad. The next day she went quite white on hearing from Mademoiselle Remanjou that Madame Boche had thrown it away before a lot of people, with an air of disgust, declaring that she was not yet reduced, thank God! to living off other people's leavings. From that time Gervaise put an end to her presents. No more bottles of wine, no more cups of broth, no more oranges, no more pieces of cake—nothing. The Boches pulled a very long face; it seemed to them like a sort of theft on the part of the Coupeaus. Gervaise saw the mistake she had made; for if she had not been foolish enough to cram them with good things, they would never have disagreed at all. Now the *concierge* said all manner of bad things about her. At the October term she kicked up no end of a row with the landlord, M. Marescot, because the laundress had been eating up house and home with her gluttony, and was a day behindhand with her rent; whereupon M. Marescot, not too polite either, came into the shop without taking off his hat, and asked for his money down, which was given him at once. Naturally the Boches had now joined hands with the Lorilleux. It was now the Lorilleux who fêted them in their lodge, with all the effusiveness of a

reconciliation. If it had not been for the Clop-clop they would never have fallen out; she was enough to make the very stones fight with one another. Ah! now the Boches knew what she really was, now they knew what the Lorilleux had had to put up with. And, when she passed, they all pretended to make fun of her behind the door.

One day, however, Gervaise went up to the Lorilleux. It was on account of old Madame Coupeau, who was then sixty-seven. Her sight had now quite given way; and her legs were giving way as well. She had been forced to give up her last lodgings, and she was in danger of starving to death if someone did not look after her. It seemed to Gervaise shameful that a woman of that age, with three children, should be so utterly abandoned and without help. And as Coupeau refused to speak to the Lorilleux, telling Gervaise that she could go up and see them if she liked, she went straight up in a whirl of indignation, which completely possessed her.

Once there, she entered without knocking, a very tempest. Nothing was changed since the evening when she had seen the Lorilleux for the first time, and when they had given her such a far from agreeable reception. The same piece of faded stuff separated the work-room from the living-room, an elongated dwelling-place which seemed made for an eel. At the other end, Lorilleux, leaning over his bench, twisted together his chain-links one after another, while Madame Lorilleux drew a piece of gold-wire through the draw-plate, standing in front of the vice. The little forge, in full daylight, cast a rosy shadow.

"Yes, it's me!" said Gervaise. "You're surprised, I suppose, since we're at daggers drawn? But I don't come on my account, nor on yours, as you may be quite sure. It's about old Madame Coupeau that I've come. Yes, I want to know if we are going to let her wait on the charity of others for a mouthful of bread."

"Well, well! there's a nice way to come in!" murmured Madame Lorilleux. "I call that cheek."

And she turned her back, going on pulling at her gold-wire as if her sister-in-law were not there. But Lorilleux raised his pallid face, crying,—

"What do you say?"

Then, as he had heard everything perfectly well, he went on,—

"More rows still, I suppose! It is very nice of old Madame Coupeau to go about everywhere complaining of her poverty, yet the day before yesterday she had a meal here. We do what we can, for our part; we haven't got all Peru. Only, if it pleases her to gossip at other people's houses, she can stay there. We don't want anyone spying about here."

He took up his chain once more, and turned his back also, adding, with a certain reluctance,—

"If everyone else likes to give a hundred sous a month, we will give a hundred sous."

Gervaise had calmed down, her rage cooled somewhat by the stony faces of the Lorilleux. She never put foot in their place without a feeling of uneasiness. She looked down on the ground, on the squares of wood put to catch the gold dust, and explained how matters stood, with more moderation. Old Madame

Coupeau had three children; if each gave a hundred sous, that would only make fifteen francs, and really that wasn't enough, she couldn't live on that; it must be at least three times as much as that.

Lorilleux, aghast, demanded where he was to raise fifteen francs every month? People were very much mistaken if they supposed he was rich, because he had gold about. Then he began to grumble at old Madame Coupeau; she would have her coffee in the morning, she took brandy, she made as many demands as if she had a fortune. Good Lord! everybody liked to take it easy, but if you had never put aside a sou in your life, you had simply to tighten your belt and go without. Besides, old Madame Coupeau was not too old to work; she could still see jolly clear when she wanted to pick a good morsel out of the dish; in fact, she was a tricky old person, who wanted to be cockered up all her time. Even if he had the means, he should have disapproved of supporting anybody in idleness like that.

Meanwhile Gervaise remained conciliatory, discussing peaceably all these objections. She tried to soften the Lorilleux. But at length the husband gave over answering her. The wife was now before the forge, finishing off a bit of chain in the little long-handled copper saucepan filled with lye-water. She still turned her back ostentatiously, as if she were a hundred leagues away. And Gervaise still went on speaking, watching them at work, in the black dust of the workroom, their bodies bent, their clothes patched and stained, and themselves hardened and blunted as old tools, in their constrained, mechanical

labour. Then her anger boiled up in her again, and she cried,—

"All right, that's just what I want; keep your money! I shall take in old Madame Coupeau, do you understand? I picked up a stray cat the other day; I can very well pick up your mother. And she shall want for nothing, and she shall have her coffee, and she shall have her brandy. Good God! what a filthy set!"

Madame Lorilleux faced about of a sudden. She brandished the saucepan as if she were going to throw the lye-water in her sister-in-law's face. She stuttered out,—

"You sling your hook, or I shall do you a mischief! And don't you count on the hundred sous, because I shall not give a brass farthing; no, not a brass farthing! A hundred sous, indeed! Mother would simply be your servant, and you would stuff yourself with my hundred sous! If she goes to you, you just tell her I wouldn't send her a glass of water; no, not if she were dying! Out you go—quick! Rid the blessed place of you!"

"Oh, you monster!" said Gervaise, banging the door behind her.

Next day she took old Madame Coupeau into her house. She put her bed in the little room where Nana slept, and which got its light from a little round window near the ceiling. The house-moving was not a lengthy one, for old Madame Coupeau's only pieces of furniture were a bed, an old mahogany cupboard, which was put in the dirty clothes' room, a table, and two chairs; the table was sold, the chairs

new seated. And the old woman, the very night she came, gave the place a sweeping up and washed up the dishes; in short, made herself quite useful, very pleased at getting out of a difficulty. The Lorilleux were simply frantic; the more so as Madame Lerat had made friends again with the Coupeaus. One day the two sisters had exchanged words on the subject of Gervaise. The former had ventured to approve of her conduct in regard to their mother; then, seeing the other exasperated, she had gone on teasingly to praise the laundress's eyes, magnificent eyes, at which you could light a candle; and after slapping one another's faces, they swore never to speak to one another again. Now Madame Lerat spent her evenings in the laundry, where she was finely tickled by Clémence and her naughty sayings.

Three years passed. There were quarrels, and quarrels were made up again. Gervaise cared very little for the Lorilleux, the Boches, and all who chose to have differences with her. If they were not satisfied, they could go about their own business. She earned as much money as she liked, which was the main thing. In the neighbourhood she had come to be a good deal looked up to, for there were not many customers so good, so prompt in payment, so little difficult to deal with. She had her bread from Madame Coudeloup, Rue des Poissonniers; her meat from fat Charles, a butcher in the Rue Polonceau, her groceries from Lehongre, Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, almost opposite the laundry. François, from the wine-shop at the corner of the street, served her with wine, fifty bottles at a time. Her neighbour Vigouroux,

whose wife must be black and blue, one would think, with all the pinching and pulling about that she got, sold her coke at the gas company's rates. And it must be said they all did their best for her, knowing it was to their advantage to be on good terms with her. So when she came outside, bareheaded and in her slippers, she was greeted on all sides; she was still in her own domain, the streets near by being like natural dependencies of her business-place, planted there squarely on the pavement. Sometimes, now, she would leave an order a little in the lurch in her pleasure at being out of doors in the midst of her friends. When she had no time to cook anything, she went out and got something ready cooked, and she would stop and gossip with the eating-house keeper who had the opposite side of the house, a great place with immense dusty windows, through which the dim light of the courtyard made its way. Or she would stop and chat, her hands full of plates and dishes, before one of the ground-floor windows, looking in at the interior of the cobbler's, the bed not made, the ground strewn with things, two lop-sided cradles, and an earthenware pot full of black water. But the neighbour that she respected the most was still the one opposite to her, the watchmaker, the spruce frock-coated gentleman always fumbling away at his watches with little tiny tools; and she often crossed the street to nod to him, laughing with pleasure as she looked into the little shop, no bigger than a cupboard, and saw all the little clocks ticking gaily away, striking the wrong hours all together.

CHAPTER VI

One autumn afternoon, Gervaise, on her way back from the Rue des Portes-Blanches, where she had been taking some clothes to a customer, found herself at the bottom of the Rue des Poissonniers just as the light was fading. It had rained that morning, the air was soft, an odour rose from the damp pavement; and the laundress, hampered by her big basket, breathed heavily, dragging her feet a little, her body drooping, making her way up the street with a sort of vaguely sensual desire, bred of her lassitude. She would have liked to have something nice to eat. Then, as she raised her eyes, she saw the name of the Rue Marcadet on the corner of the street, and the idea suddenly occurred to her to go and see Goujet at his forge. Twenty times he had asked her to step over some day when she would like to see how iron was worked. Besides, before the other workmen, she would ask for Étienne, she would seem to have come merely to see her son.

The manufactory of bolts and rivets must be in that direction, at that end of the Rue Marcadet, she did not quite know where; especially as the numbers were often wanting, along the buildings,

separated by open spaces. It was a street in which she would not have lived for worlds, a big, dirty street, black with coal-dust from the manufactories all round, with dilapidated pavements, and ruts in which the water lay in puddles. At each end was a row of sheds, great workshops with glass windows, grey elevations, unfinished-looking, their bricks and timbers bare, a confusion of tumble-down masonry with great gaps between, with dubious lodging-houses and low taverns on either side. She only remembered that the manufactory was near an old rag and iron store, a sort of open sewer, in which slept hundreds of thousands of francs' worth of merchandise, Goujet had told her. And she tried to find her way in the midst of the roar of factories: thin chimneys on the roof poured out great clouds of steam; a steam-saw sounded out with a continuous screech, like the sharp tearing of a piece of calico; button manufactories shook the soil with the roll and tic-tac of their machines. As she gazed towards Montmartre, undecided, not knowing whether to go on further, a puff of wind blew down the soot from a tall chimney, filling the street with stench; and she closed her eyes, half suffocated, when she heard a rhythmical sound of hammers; without knowing it, she was right opposite the manufactory, which she recognized by the hole at the side, full of old rags.

Nevertheless she still hesitated, not knowing where to find an entrance. A broken-down fencing opened up a passage that seemed to lose itself in the rubbish of a house that was being pulled down. As a pool of muddy water barred the way, two planks had

been laid across. At last she ventured upon the planks, turned to the left, and found herself lost in a strange forest of old carts, lying with their shafts in the air—ruined hovels whose beams still remained standing. At the end, like a bit of day in the midst of this dark and dismal night, a red light burned. The noise of hammers had ceased. She advanced cautiously towards the light, when a workman passed her close by, his face blackened with coal and covered with a bristling beard; he gave her a sidelong glance out of his pale eyes as he passed.

"Monsieur," she asked, "it is here, isn't it, that a boy called Étienne works? It is my boy."

"Étienne, Étienne," said the workman, huskily, swaying to and fro. "Étienne—no, don't know him."

When he opened his mouth, he exhaled an odour of alcohol like that which comes from a newly-opened cask of old brandy. And as he was beginning to be rather familiar, meeting a woman like that in a dark corner, Gervaise recoiled, murmuring,—

"It is here, though, that Monsieur Goujet works?"

"Ah! Goujet, yes!" said the workman; "I know Goujet. If it is Goujet you want to see, go right to the end."

And turning he shouted with his voice, that sounded like cracked brass,—

"I say, Gueule-d'Or, a lady for you!"

But the shout was lost in a clatter of iron. Gervaise went right to the end. She reached a great door, and looked in. It was a huge building in which she could at first distinguish nothing. The forge, as if extinct, shone in a corner with the pale brilliancy

of a star, beating back the darkness about it. Great shadows floated around; and from moment to moment black masses were to be seen passing in front of the fire, blocking up this last patch of light—men of incredible size, whose huge proportions one guessed at. Gervaise dared not venture in; she called out softly from the door,—

"Monsieur Goujet! Monsieur Goujet!"

Suddenly the place was all lit up. The bellows had begun to work, and a jet of white flame issued. The shed was now visible, closed in by great planks, with holes roughly plastered, and corners consolidated with brickwork. The coal dust, flying in every direction, covered the place with a sort of greyish soot. Cobwebs hung from the beams, like rags hung out to dry, heavy with years of accumulated dirt. About the walls, lying on shelves, hung on nails, or thrown in dark corners, a pell-mell of old irons and implements, huge tools, were strewn about, standing out in sharp, hard outline. And the white flame still rose dazzlingly, falling like a ray of sunlight on the beaten soil, where the polished steel of four anvils, fixed in their blocks, looked like silver dotted with gold.

Then Gervaise recognized Goujet beside the forge, by his yellow beard. Étienne was blowing the bellows, and there were two other workmen there. She only saw Goujet, and she went forward and stood in front of him.

"What! Madame Gervaise!" he cried, his face beaming, "what a good surprise!"

But, as his fellow-workmen looked very quizzical,

he drew Etienne over to his mother, and went on,—

"You have come to see the boy. He gets on very well; he is getting a famous wrist of his own."

"Well, well!" she said, "it isn't easy to get here. I thought I had got to the end of the world."

And she told him how she had come. Then she asked why the name of Étienne was not known there. Goujet laughed; he explained to her that everyone called him little Zouzou, because his hair was cropped close, like that of a Zouave. While they were talking, Étienne stopped blowing the bellows, and the flame of the forge went down, the rosy light dwindled away into the darkness of the shed. The blacksmith looked tenderly at Gervaise, who stood there smiling, bringing so fresh an aspect into that artificial light. Then, as neither of them spoke, standing there together in the darkness, he seemed to recollect himself, and broke the silence,—

"Excuse me, Madame Gervaise, I have something to finish. Stay there; you are not in anybody's way."

She stood there. Étienne had returned to the bellows. The forge flamed, sending up rockets of sparks; especially as the boy, wanting to shew off his strength before his mother, let loose a perfect whirlwind. Goujet stood watching a bar of iron which was heating; he waited, pincers in hand. He was in the full blaze of the light. His shirt sleeves were rolled up, his collar was open at the neck, leaving bare his arms and his chest, a rosy skin like that of a girl, on which curled little blonde hairs; and, with his head bowed on his huge shoulders, on which the muscles stood out in knots, his face

attentive, his pale eyes fixed steadily on the flame, he looked like a giant in repose, tranquil in his strength. When the bar was white-hot, he seized it with the pincers, and with his hammer cut it off into regular sections on the anvil, as if he had been breaking bits of glass, with little taps. Then he put the bits back in the fire, taking them out again one by one, to work them into shape. He was forging six-sided rivets. He put the ends in a heading-frame, hammered down the iron at the top, flattened the six sides, and then threw the finished rivets, still red-hot, on the ground, where they went out in darkness; and he hammered away without a pause, swinging in his right hand a hammer weighing five pounds, finishing off some detail at every blow, turning and manipulating his iron so deftly, that he could go on talking and looking about all the time. The anvil rang out its silvery chime, and the blacksmith, without a drop of sweat, quite at his ease, hammered away as composedly, and apparently with as little effort, as when he was cutting out his figures at home in the evening.

"Oh, that—it's only a small rivet, twenty millimètres," he said, in answer to Gervaise's questions. "One could do three hundred a day. But it needs practice, because one's arm soon gets tired."

When she asked him if his wrist was not stiff by night, he had a good laugh. Did she think he was a young lady? His wrist had seen some hard work since he was fifteen; it had turned to iron with pulling about so many tools. However, she was right enough; a gentleman who had never forged a rivet or a bolt,

and who tried to play with his hammer of five pounds' weight, would get a pretty stroke of lumbago at the end of two hours. It looked nothing at all, but it often cleaned out a good solid chap in a few years. Meanwhile the other workmen went on hammering away, all together. Their huge shadows danced in the light, the red gleam of the iron as it was taken out of the fire flashed into the darkness, a splutter of sparks flew out under the blows of the hammers, shining like suns, almost on the level of the anvils. And Gervaise seemed to be caught up into the wind of the forge, happy to be there, without a wish to be going. She made a large *détour* in order to get near Étienne without risk of getting her hands burnt, when she saw the dirty-bearded workman, whom she had spoken to outside, come in.

"So you found him, Madame?" said he, with his bantering, drunken air. "Gueule-d'Or, you know it was I who told the lady where to find you."

He was called Bec-Salé, otherwise Boit-sans-Soif, a bolt-maker of great dash, as strong as a horse, who rinced his irons in a pint of brandy a day. He had gone out for a drop then, unable to wait till six o'clock. When he found out that Zouzou was called Étienne, he thought it very droll; and he laughed, showing his discoloured teeth. Then he recognized Gervaise. Only the day before, he had had a glass with Coupeau. You might mention Bec-Salé, otherwise Boit-sans-Soif, to Coupeau; he would say at once, he's a good fellow! That chap Coupeau was a good sort, he stood treat oftener than his turn.

"I am very glad to know you are his wife," he

went on. "He deserves a pretty wife. I say, Gueule-d'Or, she is pretty, isn't she?"

He came close to her with a gallant air, and she had to take up her basket, and hold it in front of her, in order to keep him at a distance. Goujet was vexed, knowing that his fellow-workman wanted to tease him on account of his friendly relations with Gervaise, and he shouted,—

"I say, lazy-bones! when are we to do the forty millimètres? Are you game now, now that you've got your belly full, you damned bibber?"

The blacksmith referred to an order for big bolts, which needed two strikers at the anvil.

"Right away, if you will, big baby!" replied Bec-Salé, otherwise Boit-sans-Soif. "Sucks its thumb, it does, and thinks itself a man! I've eaten others as big as you!"

"All right, straight away! Come along, us two!"

"Right you are, old joker!"

The presence of Gervaise had put them both on their metal. Goujet put the pieces of iron, ready cut, into the fire; then he fixed on the anvil a large sized heading-frame. The other workman had taken from against the wall two huge sledge-hammers of twenty pounds, the two big sisters, Fifine and Dédèle. And he bragged away, telling of a half-gross of rivets that he had forged for the Dunkerque lighthouse, regular jewels, things to put in a museum, so prettily he had worked them. What the blazes! he wasn't the man to fear competition; you might hunt all over the city without finding another like him. Oh, it was going

to be a joke; now we shall see what we shall see.

"The lady shall decide," he said, turning to Gervaise.

"Enough chatter!" cried Goujet. "At it, Zouzou. There's no heat there, my lad!"

But Bec-Salé, otherwise Boit-sans-Soif, asked again,—

"Do we both strike together?"

"Not at all! a bolt each, old man!"

The proposition caused a sensation, and the other workman, despite his cheek, felt his mouth turn dry. Bolts of forty millimètres made by one man? such a thing had never been heard of, especially as the bolts had to be rounded at the top—a deuce of a piece of work, a regular poser. The three other workmen had left their work to look on; a big lean fellow wagered a bottle of wine that Goujet would be beaten. Meanwhile the two blacksmiths each took a sledge-hammer, choosing them with eyes closed, for Fifine weighed half a pound more than Dédèle. Bec-Salé, otherwise Boit-sans-Soif, had the good luck to lay hands on Dédèle; Gueule-d'Or took Fifine. And the former, as he waited for the iron to get white-hot, stood before the anvil, throwing tender glances in the direction of Gervaise; then he put himself in position, tapping his foot like one who is ready for the fight, already swaying Dédèle lightly in the air. Damn it all! he was all there; he'd make a cake of the Vendôme Column!

"Now, at it!" said Goujet, placing in the heading-frame one of the bits of iron, as big as a girl's wrist.

Bec-Salé, otherwise Boit-sans-Soif, leant back, and whirled Dédèle into the air with both hands. Small and lean, with his stubbly beard, and his wolfish eyes shining under his matted crop of hair, he made a tremendous exertion at every blow of the hammer, leaping off the ground as if carried away by his own fury. He went at it desperately, fighting with his iron, wroth with it for being so hard; and he gave a grunt when he had given it a good sound box. Brandy might weaken the arms of others, but he had need of it in his veins instead of blood; the last drop he had drunk warmed his carcase like a boiler, he felt as damned strong as a steam-hammer. And the iron feared him that day; he beat it flatter than a quid of tobacco. And didn't Dédèle waltz! She cut capers, heels in the air, like a little baggage at the Elysée-Montmartre shewing off her under-things; for it is no good dawdling, iron is such a brute, it cools in no time, with one hammer. In thirty strokes Bec-Salé, otherwise Boit-sans-Soif, had formed the head of his bolt. But he was panting, his eyes starting out of their sockets; and he was seized with a furious anger when he heard his joints crack. Then, dancing and grimacing, he delivered two more blows, simply to revenge himself for his discomfort. When he took it out of the heading-frame, the bolt was deformed, the head on one side like a hunch-back's.

"Well, does that look neat?" said he, with his usual self-confidence, presenting his work to Gervaise.

"I am not well up in it, monsieur," she answered, with an air of reserve.

But she saw clearly enough on the head of the bolt the mark of Dédèle's last two kicks, and she was awfully pleased. She put her lips together so as not to laugh, for Goujet now had all the chances on his side.

It was Gueule-d'Or's turn. Before beginning, he threw Gervaise a look full of confidence and of tenderness. Then, without hurrying, he measured his distance and brought down the hammer in steady, downward, regular strokes. His stroke was classic, correct, measured, supple. Fifine, in his hands, danced no low *chahut*, her legs outside her petticoat; she rose and fell rhythmically, like a noble lady leading a grave and ancient minuet. Fifine's heels beat the measure solemnly, sinking into the red-hot iron on the head of the bolt with a deliberate skill, first flattening the metal in the middle, then modelling it with a series of strokes, each delivered with perfect precision. Sure enough, it was not brandy that Gueule-d'Or had in his veins; it was blood, pure blood, whose mighty beats made themselves felt in the very hammer, marking time. What a splendid fellow he was for work! He stood full in face of the whole heat of the forge. His short hair, curling over his low forehead, his fine golden beard, with its close ringlets, were lit up, they shone all golden, a very head of gold, in truth. And he had a neck like a pillar, white as the neck of a child; an immense breadth of chest, wide enough for a woman to lie across it; shoulders and arms that seemed to belong to some sculptured giant in a museum. When he put forth all his strength, his

muscles swelled, mountains of flesh rolling and hardening under the skin; his shoulders, neck, and chest distended, he cast a light all around him, he was strong and mighty as a god. Twenty times already he had brought down Fifine, his eyes fixed on the iron, drawing in his breath at each stroke, with only two large drops of sweat trickling over his forehead. He counted: twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three. Fifine continued tranquilly her lordly reverences.

"What a prig!" muttered sneeringly Bec-Salé, otherwise Boit-sans-Soif.

And Gervaise, standing opposite to Gueule-d'Or, gazed at him with an affectionate smile. Good Lord! what fools men were! Were not those two hammering away on their bolts in order to pay court to her? Oh, she saw well enough that they were disputing over her, they and their hammers; they were like two great crested cocks shewing off before a little white hen. It was an odd contrivance, wasn't it? Still, people sometimes make love in a very strange manner. Yes, it was for her, this thunder of Dédèle and Fifine on the anvil; it was for her, all this battering of iron; it was for her, this forge in motion, flaming like a conflagration, sending out showers of sparks. They were fashioning their love for her, and it was for that they disputed with each other, seeing who could fashion it the best. And, truly, she was glad at heart; for what woman does not love compliments? The hammering of Gueule-d'Or, in particular, spoke to her heart; it rang out a clear music on the anvil, as if in accompaniment to the beating

of her own blood. Folly as it seems, she felt as if that drove something home in her, something solid, like bolt-iron. That evening, on her way home, along the damp pavement, she had had a vague desire, a longing after something good to eat; now she was satisfied, as if the strokes of Gueule-d'Or's hammer had sufficed her. Oh! she had no doubt of his success. It was to him that she was destined to fall. Bec-Salé, otherwise Boit-sans-Soif, was too hideous in his dirty workman's things, skipping about like an escaped monkey. And she waited, flushed and yet happy in the intense heat, delighting to be shaken from head to foot by the last strokes of Fifine.

Goujet still went on counting.

"And twenty-eight," he said at last, resting the hammer on the ground. "It is finished; you can look at it."

The head of the bolt was smooth, flawless, without a crease, a regular bit of jeweller's work, round as a billiard ball made in a mould. The workmen gazed at it, wagging their heads; there was not a word to be said, one might go on one's knees to it. Bec-Salé, otherwise Boit-sans-Soif, tried to turn it off as a joke; but he found nothing to say, and he went back to his anvil with his tail between his legs. Meanwhile, Gervaise pressed against Goujet, as if to see better. Étienne had left the bellows, the forge was once more sunk in shadow, like a red sunset falling all at once into the sheer darkness of night. And to the blacksmith and the laundress it seemed delicious to be there, with this night about them, in

the shed black with soot and iron filings, full of the smell of old iron; they would not have seemed more alone in the Bois de Vincennes, if they had had a rendez-vous in mid-forest. He took her hand as if he had won her.

But outside, they had not a word to say. He could think of nothing; except that she might have taken Étienne along with her if he had not had another half-hour's work to do. She was on the point of going, when he called her back again, trying to keep her with him a few minutes longer.

"Come, you haven't seen everything. Really it is very curious."

He took her to the right, into another shed, where there was a machine-manufactory belonging. On the threshold she hesitated, taken with an instinctive fear. The great building, shaken by all these machines, trembled; and huge shadows waved in the air, streaked with vivid fire. But he reassured her, smiling, swearing that there was nothing to fear; she must only be careful not to let her skirts go too near the cog-wheels. He went first, she following, in a deafening din where all sorts of noises hissed and rumbled, in the midst of smoke peopled with vague beings, black hurrying men, machines with waving arms, which she could not distinguish from one another. The passages were very narrow, one had to step over obstacles, get out of the way of holes, step aside to make way for a cart. They could not hear each other speak. As yet she saw nothing; all danced before her eyes. Then, as she felt a sensation above her head like a great flutter of wings, she

looked up, and stood still to watch the straps running along the ceiling like a gigantic spider's web, every thread going in a different direction; the motor steam-engine was hidden away in a corner, behind a little brick wall; and the straps seemed to run of their own accord, coming swiftly out of the shadowy distance, with a regular, soft, continuous, gliding motion, like a bird of the night. But she nearly fell, striking her foot against one of the ventilating pipes, which crossed in all directions on the beaten soil, sending out their little sharp breath of wind on all the little forges beside the machines. And first of all he shewed her that: he let loose the air on one of the furnaces; large sheets of fan-shaped flames spread from all four sides, a circle of indentated flames, dazzlingly, turning to a deep red; the light was so strong that the workmen's small lamps looked like spots of shadow on the sun. Then he raised his voice to explain things to her, he shewed her the machines, mechanical scissors which cut up bars of iron, severing a piece at each bite, spitting out the ends at the back, one by one; bolt and rivet machines, big and complicated, forging the heads with a single pressure of their powerful screw; the shearing machines with cast-iron fly-wheels, an iron ball which struck the air furiously at every piece they trimmed; the worming-machines, manipulated by women, worming the bolts and their spiral screws, with the tic-tac of their wheel-work of steel, shining under the grease with which they had been oiled. She could thus follow the whole series, from the block-iron leaning against the walls, to the finished bolts and rivets, heaped up in cases in

every corner. She understood it all now, and she smiled and nodded; but she was a little nervous all the same, nervous at being so small and frail among all these rugged metal-workers; turning, now and again, her blood curdling, at the dull noise of a shearing-machine. She grew accustomed to the dim light, could see into the recesses where men, standing motionless, regulated the panting dance of fly-wheels, when a furnace suddenly let loose the vivid illumination of its circle of flame. And, in spite of herself, it was constantly to the ceiling that she turned back, to the very life-blood of the machines, the flexile flight of leathern straps above her, with their huge and silent force passing in the vague night of the rafters.

Meanwhile, Goujet had stopped before one of the rivetting machines. He stood there, looking down with fixed eyes, absorbed in a reverie. The machine forged rivets of forty millimètres with the tranquil ease of a giant. And nothing, indeed, could be more simple. The stoker took the piece of iron from the furnace; the striker placed it in the heading-frame, on which a stream of water was constantly running in order to preserve the temper of the steel; and it was done, the screw came down, the bolt fell to the ground with its head as round as if it had been placed in a mould. In twelve hours this infernal machine turned out hundreds of kilogrammes. Goujet, little disposed as he was to malevolence, felt at certain moments as if he would gladly have brought down Fifine on all that apparatus of iron, whose arms were so far more powerful than his own. It caused

him a huge annoyance, even when he reasoned that flesh and blood could not fight against iron. One day, for certain, the machine would put an end to the workman; already their day's wages had fallen from twelve to nine francs, and there was talk of reducing them yet further; and they were not pretty at all, those great beasts that made rivets and bolts as if they were making sausages. He gazed at the machines for three good minutes without speaking; he frowned, and his golden beard bristled threateningly. Then a resigned and composed air came slowly back to his features. He turned towards Gervaise, who pressed up against him, and said with a sad smile,—

"Well, it takes us down a peg! But perhaps one day it will be for the general good."

Gervaise laughed at the "general good." The machine-made bolts seem to her badly made.

"You know what I mean!" she cried, excitedly, "they are too well made. I like yours better. There one feels the artist's hand."

It was a great joy to him to hear her say that, for he was wondering if she would despise him after having seen the machines. Lord! if he were stronger than Bec-Salé, otherwise Boit-sans-Soif, the machines were stronger than he. When at last he left her in the court-yard, he squeezed her hands nearly hard enough to break them, in his delight.

The laundress went every Saturday to the Goujets' to fetch the clothes. They still lived in the little house of the Rue Neuve de la Goutte-d'Or. The first year she had paid them regularly twenty francs

a month, on the five hundred francs, so as to keep the accounts straight. The book was made up at the month, and she added the amount necessary to make up the twenty francs, for the Goujets' washing was never more than seven or eight francs a month. She had paid off about half of the amount, when, one quarter-day, not knowing how to pay the rent, her customers having failed to settle up, she had had to run and borrow the money from the Goujets. Two other times, in order to pay her work-people, she had had to come to them, so that the debt had gone up again to four hundred and twenty-five francs. Now she paid out nothing; she acquitted herself simply by the washing. It was not that she was working less, or her business less flourishing, quite the contrary; but money with her had a way of melting, and she was only too thankful when she could make both ends meet. Goodness knows, if one can just get along, there is not too much to complain of. She took on flesh, and she gave way to all the little idle inclinations that came with it, not having the strength of mind to look the future fairly in the face. So much the worse, the money would come in somehow; it only rusted by being put aside. Madame Goujet, meanwhile, still kept a maternal eye on Gervaise. She sometimes lectured her kindly, not on account of her money, but because she liked her, and feared to see her get on a wrong tack. She never so much as referred to her money. She treated her, in short, with the most delicate consideration.

The day after the visit of Gervaise to the forge was the last Saturday of the month. When she

reached the Goujets', where she always went herself, she was quite out of breath for a few minutes, so hard had the basket been pulling at her arms. You would never think how heavy linen is, especially when there are sheets.

"You have brought it all?" asked Madame Goujet.

She was very strict on this subject. She insisted on having her linen brought back to her in good order, without an article missing. And she was particular, too, that the laundress should come exactly on the same day, and at exactly the same hour; in that way there was no time lost.

"Oh yes, there is everything there," replied Gervaise, with a smile. "You know that I am never behindhand."

"True," Madame Goujet admitted, "you are acquiring some faults, but you have not yet got that one."

And while the laundress took the things out of her basket and placed them on the bed, the old woman praised up her good qualities; she did not burn the things, she did not tear them as so many others did, did not pull off the buttons with the irons only she used too much blue, and starched the shirt fronts too much.

"Look here, it is like cardboard," she went on, making one of the shirt fronts crack. "My son never complains, but it cuts into his neck. His neck will be all red to-morrow when we come back from Vincennes."

"No, don't say that!" cried Gervaise, in dis-

tress. "White shirts ought to be rather stiff, if one is not to carry about rags on one. See how gentlemen wear them. I do all your linen myself. The work-people never touch it, and I look after it very carefully, I assure you; I would go over it ten times, because it is yours, you know."

She blushed a little as she said the last words. She was afraid she had shewn too clearly the pleasure she took in ironing Goujet's shirts herself. Indeed she had no improper thoughts in that connection, but she was none the less a little ashamed of herself.

"Oh, I don't complain of your work; you do it to perfection, I know," said Madame Goujet. "Here, for instance, is a cap which is exquisite. Nobody brings out the embroidery like you do. And the gauffering is beautifully done, too. Oh, I know your hand in a minute. If you only give a duster to one of the work-people, one sees it. Only, please put a little less starch, that's all. Goujet isn't so anxious to pass for a gentleman."

Meanwhile, she had taken the book and struck out the list of articles with her pen. It was all right. When they made out the account she saw that Gervaise had charged her six sous for a cap; she protested, but she had to admit that it was not dear, as things went; no, shirts, five sous, women's drawers, four sous, pillow-cases, one sou and a half, aprons, one sou, it was not dear, considering that many laundresses charged half a sou or a whole one extra for all these articles. Then, when Gervaise had called over the dirty linen, which the old woman wrote down, she stowed it away in her basket; but

still she did not move, looking embarrassed, as if she had something on her lips which it irked her to bring out.

"Madame Goujet," she said at length, "if you don't mind, I'll take the money for the washing this month."

The month was rather a dear one, the account they had just made out came to ten francs seven sous. Madame Goujet considered her seriously for a moment. Then she replied,—

"My child, it shall be as you like. I don't wish to refuse you the money, if you are in need of it. Only, it is not the way to pay off your debts. I say that for your sake, you understand. Really, you ought to be careful."

Gervaise looked down, and took her lesson with some confusion. The ten francs were to make out the amount of a note that she had given her coke-dealer. But Madame Goujet was more severe than ever at the word note. She mentioned what she herself was doing, she was reducing her expenses, now that Goujet's wages had gone down from twelve to nine francs. When you were not wise in your youth you had to suffer for it when you were old. However, she restrained herself from telling Gervaise that she gave her the clothes to wash, simply in order that she might be able to pay off her debt; formerly she had done all the washing herself, and she meant to do so again, if the washing were going to put her out of pocket to that extent. As soon as Gervaise had the ten francs seven sous, she thanked her and hurried off. When she got outside on the landing she was

ready to dance, for she was already used to the evils and worries of money, and she only thought now of the luck of getting through them until next time.

It was on this very same Saturday that Gervaise had a strange encounter on the stairs, as she was coming down from the Goujets'. She had to squeeze herself and her basket against the wall to make room for a tall woman, without a bonnet, who was coming upstairs with a very fresh mackerel, its gills still bleeding, in a piece of paper. It was Virginie, the girl to whom she had given such a trouncing at the wash-house. They both stared at one another, and Gervaise instinctively shut her eyes, expecting to have the mackerel flung in her face. Not at all; Virginie gave a faint smile. Thereupon the laundress, whose basket blocked up the staircase, said politely,—

"I beg your pardon."

"It is granted," replied the other.

And they stopped in the middle of the staircase, chatting as if they were on perfectly good terms, without a single allusion to the past. Virginie, who was then twenty-nine, had turned out a fine strapping woman, her face rather long between the two jet-black coils of hair that framed in her forehead. She told her whole story at once, in order to shew off: she was married now, since the spring; her husband had been a cabinet-maker; he had just served his time as a soldier, and was trying to get a place as police-man, because a place is more certain and more respectable. She had just been out to get a mackerel for him.

"He simply dotes on it," she said. "We have to spoil them, these wretched men, don't we? But come up. Come in and see our place. We are in a draught here."

When Gervaise, after having in her turn told her of her marriage, mentioned that she herself had lived there, and even had a child there, Virginie pressed her more urgently to come in. It is always pleasant to see the places where one has been happy. She, for the last five years, had been living across the water, at the Gros-Caillou. It was there that she had met her husband, when he was still in the army. But she found it tedious there, she longed to come back to the Goutte-d'Or quarter, where she knew everybody. Oh! all her things were in disorder; they would get straight little by little.

Then, on the landing, they told one another their names.

"Madame Coupeau."

"Madame Poisson."

And from that time they called one another Madame Poisson and Madame Coupeau, out in full, simply for the pleasure of being married ladies, after having known one another under less orthodox circumstances. However, Gervaise retained a certain amount of mistrust. It might be that Virginie was patching up matters in order to have her revenge for the thrashing at the wash-house; it might be she was meditating some hypocritical little scheme. Gervaise said to herself that she would be on her guard. For the moment Virginie was so amiable that one must needs be amiable as well.

Upstairs in the room, Poisson, the husband, a man of five-and-thirty, with an ashy face and red moustache and imperial, was sitting working at a table by the window, making little boxes. His only tools were a penknife, a little saw as big as a file for paring nails, and a glue-pot. The wood that he used came from old cigar-boxes, thin slips of unpolished mahogany, which he cut and carved with extraordinary delicacy. All day long, from year's end to year's end, he went on making the same box, eight centimètres by six; only, he inlaid it, invented new kinds of lid, put in compartments. It was merely for his own amusement, a way of killing time until he should get his nomination as policeman. Out of his old trade as cabinet-maker the passion for little boxes had stuck to him. He did not sell his work; he gave it away to his acquaintances.

Poisson rose and bowed politely to Gervaise, whom his wife introduced as an old friend. But he was not much of a talker, and he soon went back to his little saw; only from time to time he glanced at the mackerel lying on the edge of the dresser. Gervaise was very much interested to see her old place again. She pointed out where the furniture had been placed, and she shewed the spot where she had given birth to her child on the ground. How oddly things turned out! After having lost sight of one another for so long, who would have thought that they would meet again like that, both having lived in the same room? Virginie added further details about herself and her husband; he had had some money left him by an aunt; he would get

settled later on, no doubt; for the moment, she still went on with her sempstress work, she patched up a dress now and again. After a good half hour's talk, the laundress got up to go. Poisson barely turned his head, but Virginie, accompanying her out, promised to return her visit; besides, she would send her her things to wash; that was understood. And as she still kept her talking on the landing, Gervaise fancied that she wanted to talk to her of Lantier and and her sister Adèle, the metal-polisher. She felt, inwardly, quite alarmed at the idea. But not a word was said in regard to these old annoyances, and they said good-bye in the most amiable manner.

"*Au revoir*, Madame Coupeau."

"*Au revoir*, Madame Poisson."

This was the beginning of a close acquaintance. Within a week, Virginie could not pass the laundry without dropping in, and she stayed gossipping for two and three hours together, so that Poisson, fearing she had been run over, would come to look for her, with his silent, corpse-like face. Gervaise, seeing the sempstress coming in every day, gradually grew absorbed in one idea: whenever she heard her begin a phrase, she expected it was going to be about Lantier; her mind turned inevitably to Lantier the whole time Virginie was there. It was silly enough, in all conscience, for she cared precious little for Lantier and Adèle, and what had become of them; she never asked a question about them; she did not even feel curious to have news of them. No, it was a feeling she had, quite apart from her own will. The notion of them rang in her head like the

refrain of a stupid song, which one cannot get rid of. Besides, she bore no grudge against Virginie; it was not her fault by any means. She got on very well with her, and she called her back again and again before she would let her go.

Meanwhile the winter had come, the fourth winter which the Coupeaus had spent in the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or. The December and January of that year were particularly cold. It froze hard enough to split a stone, and after New Year's Day the snow lay in the streets for three weeks without melting. It was good for work all the same, for winter is much the pleasantest time of the year when you have to work in the laundry. How pleasant it was in the shop! There were no icicles to be seen on the windows, as there were across the road, at the grocer's and the fancy shop. The stove, packed with coke, kept the place as hot as a bath-room; the linen steamed as if it were midsummer, and it was quite nice inside with the doors shut, warmed throughout, so warm, indeed, that one might drop asleep without knowing it. Gervaise would say, laughingly, that she could fancy herself in the country. And, indeed, the sound of wheels outside was lost in the snow; one could scarcely hear the sound of footsteps; only the voices of children rose into the chill silence, the uproar of a band of urchins who had made a long slide in the gutter outside the farrier's. Gervaise went sometimes to the door, and, rubbing away the steam from the glass, looked out to see how the neighbours were getting on in this infernal weather; but not a nose was put outside the door, the whole quarter seemed

to have gone to sleep; and she merely nodded to the coal-dealer's wife near by, who marched about bare-headed, grinning from ear to ear, ever since the frost set in.

What was specially pleasant in this abominable weather was to have one's coffee in the middle of the day nice and hot. The work-women had nothing to complain of; the coffee was always strong, without a grain of chicory in it; not at all like the coffee at Madame Fauconnier's, which was mere slops. Only, when old Madame Coupeau looked after the boiling, it was always behindhand, because she would go to sleep while it was over the fire. So, after *déjeuner*, the women went on with their ironing for a bit, until the coffee was ready.

The day after Twelfth Night, half-past twelve had struck, and the coffee was not ready. It would not filter out properly. Old Madame Coupeau tapped on the filter with a spoon, and the drops could be heard falling one by one, without hurrying themselves

"Let it alone," said Clémence. "You will make it muddy. We shall have plenty to eat and drink to-day."

Clémence was working over a shirt a second time, smoothing out the creases with her nail. She had a frightful cold, her eyes swollen, her chest racked with paroxysms of coughing which simply shook her to pieces. For all that, she had not even a scarf about her neck; she was dressed merely in a little cheap woollen dress, in which she shivered By her side Madame Putois, enveloped in flannel, wrapped up to the ears, was ironing out a petticoat

which she turned round and round the dress-board, one end of which was fixed on the back of a chair, while a cloth laid on the ground kept the petticoat from getting soiled by touching the floor. Gervaise had got a good half of the ironing-board to herself; she was doing embroidered muslin curtains, over which she ran her iron straight along, reaching out her arms, so as to avoid wrinkles. All at once the coffee began to run loudly, and she looked up. It was the cross-eyed Augustine, who had made a hole in the middle of the grounds, by sticking a spoon into the filter.

"Will you be quiet?" cried Gervaise. "What is the matter with you? Now we shall have to drink mud."

Old Madame Coupeau had laid out five glasses in a row on a free corner of the ironing-board. The women left their work, and Gervaise herself poured out the coffee, after putting two lumps of sugar in each glass. It was the long-looked-for hour of the day. As each took her glass and sat down on a little stool before the stove, the street door opened, and Virginie entered, shivering with the cold.

"My dear friends," she said, "it simply cuts you in two. I can't feel my ears. What beastly cold!"

"Hallo, it's Madame Poisson!" cried Gervaise. "Good! you come just at the right moment. Have some coffee with us."

"Gracious! it isn't an offer to refuse. Merely to cross the street, you get the winter in your bones."

Luckily there was some coffee left. Old Madame Coupeau brought a sixth glass, and Gervaise let Virginie help herself to sugar, out of politeness. The

women spread out a bit, so as to leave a little room for her near the stove. She shivered a moment, her nose red with cold, and she clasped her fingers tightly round the glass so as to warm them. She had just come from the grocer's, where you simply froze while you were waiting for a quarter of Gruyère. And she exclaimed at the heat of the laundry; you would fancy yourself in an oven; it was enough to arouse the dead; it tickled your skin nicely. Then, the numbness going off, she stretched out her long legs. All six sipped their coffee slowly in this momentary interruption of work, with the steam of the linen drying all around them. Only old Madame Coupeau and Virginie were sitting on chairs; the others, on their little foot-stools, seemed as if they were sitting on the ground; the cross-eyed Augustine had even pulled out a corner of the cloth under the petticoat to sit down on. At first not a word was spoken; they all had their noses in the glasses, draining out the coffee.

"After all, it is good," declared Clémence.

Then she nearly choked in a paroxysm of coughing, leaning her head against the wall to cough louder.

"You've got an awfully bad cold," said Virginie. "Where did you pick it up?"

"How should I know?" replied Clémence, wiping her face with her sleeve. "I suppose it was the other evening. There were two people flying at each other's throats on the way out from the "Grand-Balcon." I wanted to see; I stopped there, in the snow. Oh! what a tussle! I nearly died of laughing. One of them had a bloody nose, it was all running down on the ground. When the other saw the blood—a

great spindle-shanks like me—she took to her heels. That night I began to cough. Then, too, I must say men are clumsy when they sleep with a woman; they are pulling the clothes off all the night."

"Pretty conduct!" murmured Madame Putois. "You'll kill yourself, my dear."

"Well, and if it amuses me to kill myself! A nice thing life is! Scramble the whole blessed day to earn fifty-five sous, poison your blood from morning to night in front of the stove—no, no, that isn't my idea of things! However, this cold won't do me the service of finishing me up; it will go as it came."

There was a silence. That scamp of a Clémence, who led the *chahut* in the dancing halls with shrieks of gaiety, was as doleful as could be in the work-shop, with her funereal notions. Gervaise knew her of old, and merely remarked:

"You are always dismal when you've been out on the loose."

The fact was that Gervaise would have preferred that she should talk on any subject rather than that of women fighting. It made her feel awkward, on account of the thrashing at the wash-house, when anyone spoke before her and Virginie of a box on the ears, or a kick in the shins. And Virginie looked across at her with a smile.

"Oh!" she murmured, "I saw a nice clawing of chignons yesterday. They were starting right and left. . . ."

"Who?" asked Madame Putois.

"The midwife at the bottom of the street, and her servant—you know, a little fair girl. She is a

little bitch, that girl! She shouted out to the other: "Yes, yes, you made the fruiterer's wife have a miscarriage, and I'll go and tell the police if you don't pay me!" And she jawed away at her like anything. Whereupon the midwife landed her one right on the jaws. At that the little drab jumped at her mistress' eyes, and nabbed her and clawed her—oh, Lord, like a good 'un! The pork-butcher had to drag her away by force."

The work-women laughed, as in duty bound, then all sipped away at their coffee with an air of satisfaction.

"Do you believe that, that she brought about a miscarriage?" asked Clémence.

"Gracious! why everybody says so," replied Virginie "I wasn't there, you know. But it's all in the way of trade They all do it."

"Indeed, yes!" said Madame Putois, "but it's too silly to put confidence in them. A nice thing to be maimed for life! But there's one infallible recipe. You swallow a glass of holy water every night, making three signs of the cross on your stomach with your thumb. It goes off like a bit of flatulence."

Old Madame Coupeau, who seemed to be asleep, shook her head in protestation. She knew another recipe, also infallible. You must eat a hard-boiled egg every two hours, and apply spinach-leaves to your loins. The four women listened gravely. But the cross-eyed Augustine, who always roared with laughter all by herself without anyone knowing why, gave all at once the cackle which was her way of laughing. They had forgotten all about her. Gervaise lifted up

the petticoat, and discovered her on the cloth, rolling about like a pig, her legs in the air. She pulled her out, and made her get up with a box on the ears. What was there to laugh at, great goose? What business had she to listen to what her elders were saying? First of all she was to take back the linen belonging to a friend of Madame Lerat, at Batignolles. While she spoke, her mistress placed the basket on her arm, and pushed her towards the door. Augustine, sulking and sobbing, went off, dragging her feet after her in the snow.

Meanwhile, old Madame Coupeau, Madame Putois, and Clémence discussed the efficacy of hard-boiled eggs and spinach-leaves. Virginie, who seemed to be pondering, her glass of coffee in her hand, said in a low voice,—

"Lord! one fights and one makes it up; that's always the way when one has a good heart of one's own."

And turning towards Gervaise she added, with a smile,—

"No, I assure you I don't bear any grudge against you. The little affair at the wash-house, you remember."

The laundress was somewhat taken aback. That was just what she had been fearing. Now she felt sure the subject of Lantier and Adèle would come up. The stove roared, the heat was fiercer than ever. Almost overcome with it, the work-women lingered over their coffee, so as not to get back to work sooner than they were obliged, and gazed out at the snow in the street with languid airs of animal

satisfaction. They began to make confidences to one another as to what they would do if they had ten thousand francs a year. They would do nothing at all, they would sit like that the whole afternoon, warming themselves, and cursing work from afar. Virginie had come closer to Gervaise, so as not to be heard by the others. And Gervaise for the moment felt quite helpless, on account of the too great heat, no doubt, so limp and helpless, that she had not the strength of will to change the conversation; she even waited for what was coming, with an emotion which she would not admit even to herself.

"You don't mind talking about it, do you?" said Virginie. "Twenty times already it has been on the tip of my tongue. However, as we are on the subject. . . . It is something to talk about, isn't it? Oh, no, indeed! I don't bear you any grudge on account of the past. Honour bright! I don't keep that much ill-will against you."

She stirred the remains of her coffee in the glass to get at all the sugar; then she drank three drops with a little sound of her lips. Gervaise, somewhat agitated, still said nothing, wondering if Virginie had really forgiven her for the drubbing she had given her, for she saw little yellow sparks light up in the depths of her dark eyes. The she-devil had pocketed her affront, apparently; and she had put her handkerchief on top of it!

"You had some excuse," she continued; "they had served you a dirty trick—an abomination! Oh! you will admit I am just. If I had been in your place I should have drawn my knife."

She drank three drops more, sucking it up on the side of the glass; and abandoning her drawl, she went on rapidly, without stopping,—

"Besides, it didn't bring them much luck; damnation! anything but. They went off to live at some horrible place by La Glacière, in a filthy street, where you are always knee-deep in mud. Two days afterwards I went to have *déjeuner* with them, a precious distance by omnibus, I assure you; well, my dear, if they weren't bickering already! On my word, as I entered, they had actually got to blows. Nice sort of lovers! You know that Adèle really isn't worth the cord to hang her. She is my sister, but that won't hinder me from saying that she's a downright little slut. She did me no end of dirty tricks; it would be too long to tell you the whole story; besides, that is for us to settle between ourselves. As for Lantier—good Lord! you know him, he isn't too sweet-tempered either. A little chap, isn't he? But he's at you for a yes or a no. And he clenches his fist, too, when he hits out. Well, they raised hell, those two, I assure you. You could hear them at it as you went upstairs. One day it went so far that the police came in. Lantier wanted an oil soup, some nastiness they eat in the south; and as Adèle declared it was beastly, they threw the bottle of oil in each other's faces, the saucepan, and the soup-tureen, and the whole blooming lot; it was enough to set the whole neighbourhood upside down."

She told of other pitched battles; she had endless details in regard to the household; she knew of things that would make your hair stand on end.

Gervaise heard the whole story without a word; her face was pale, and she had a nervous movement at the corner of her lips which was like a little smile. It was seven years since she had heard of Lantier. She would never have believed that the name Lantier, murmured thus in her ear, would have given her such a sensation of heat in the pit of the stomach. No, she could not understand how she was still so curious in regard to this vagabond, who had behaved to her so badly. It was impossible for her to be jealous of Adèle now, but she laughed all the same, in her heart, at hearing of the squabblings of the couple; she saw the girl's body all black and blue, and it avenged her, it amused her. She could have listened to Virginie all night. She asked no questions, for she did not wish to seem so much interested. It was as if a gap in her existence were suddenly filled up; now her life in the past seemed to run right on, without a break, to her life of to-day.

Meanwhile, Virginie had returned to her glass, still trying to suck out a little more sugar. At that, Gervaise, feeling that she ought to say something, put on an air of indifference, and asked,—

"Are they still living at La Glacière?"

"Why no!' replied the other, "didn't I tell you? They are not together now, this last week. One fine day Adèle carried off her togs, and Lantier, I can assure you, didn't run after her."

The laundress gave a little cry, repeating aloud,—

"They are not together now!"

"Who?" asked Clémence, interrupting her conversation with old Madame Coupeau and Madame Putois.

"Nobody," said Virginie; "people you don't know."

But she looked at Gervaise, and it seemed to her that she was pretty much affected by the news. She came closer, seeming to take a malicious pleasure in going over her story again. Then all at once she asked what she would do if Lantier came prowling round her again; for men are so odd, Lantier was quite capable of going back to the old love. Gervaise drew herself up, sharply enough, on her dignity. She was a married woman; she would simply send Lantier packing, that was all. There could be nothing more between them, not even a hand-shake. She would be inexcusable indeed if she ever looked that man in the face again.

"I know, of course," she said, "that Étienne is his, and that is a link between us that can never be broken. If Lantier wants to see Étienne I will send him to him, because it is impossible to keep a child from loving his father. But as for me, Madame Poisson, I would be cut into bits rather than let him touch me with the tip of his finger. It is all over."

As she said these last words, she made the sign of the cross in the air, as if to seal her oath for ever. And anxious to put an end to the conversation, she gave a sudden start, and cried to the work-women,—

"I say, you people! do you think the clothes are going to iron themselves? What lazy-bones you are! Come, to work!"

The women were in no hurry to move; overcome with torpor and idleness, they sat with their arms hanging lazily, one hand still holding the empty

glasses, a little of the dregs still remaining at the bottom. They continued their conversation.

"It was little Célestine," said Clémence. "I knew her. She went cracked about cat's fur. You know, she saw cat's fur everywhere; she was always moving her tongue like that, because she thought her mouth was full of cat's fur."

"And I," said Madame Putois, "had a friend who had a worm. Oh! they have their little fancies, those beasts. He screwed up her insides when she didn't provide him with chicken. Only fancy, the husband earned seven francs, and it all went in little delicacies for the worm!"

"I could have cured her in a minute," broke in old Madame Coupeau. "You only have to swallow a grilled mouse; that poisons the worm right away."

Gervaise herself had slipped back into a state of dreamy idleness, but she shook herself and got up. There was another afternoon spent in dawdling. She was the first to go back to her curtains, but she found them soiled with coffee, and, before going on with the ironing, she had to remove the stain with a damp cloth. The women stretched themselves before the stove, and went back sulkily to their work. As soon as Clémence began to move she had a fresh access of coughing, enough to spit out her tongue; then she finished her shirt, and pinned the cuffs and collar. Madame Putois had gone back to her petticoat.

"Well, *au revoir!*" said Virginie. "I was just going to get a quarter of Gruyère. Poisson must imagine that I have frozen on the way."

She had only made three steps on the pavement

when she came back to say that Augustine was at the other end of the street, making a slide with the boys. The little scrub had been gone two good hours. She rushed in flushed and out of breath, her basket on her arm, her back hair plastered up with a snow-ball, and she pretended to grumble, in her sly way, declaring that she could scarcely walk, the ground was frozen so slippery. Some young rascal had apparently stuffed her pockets with lumps of ice, for, a quarter of an hour after, her pockets began to water the laundry-floor like a hose.

Just now most afternoons passed pretty much in this manner. The laundry became the resort of all the chilly people in the neighbourhood. All the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or knew where there was some warmth to be found. There were always some gossipping women in front of the stove, their skirts pulled up to their knees, warming themselves up. Gervaise was proud of her warm hearth, and she liked people to come in; she held her receptions, as the Lorilleux and the Boches said maliciously. The truth was that she was always obliging and ready to help, and would even bring in the poor people when she saw them shivering outside. She was particularly good to an old house-painter, seventy years old, who had a garret in the house, where he was starved with cold and hunger; he had lost his three sons in the Crimea, and he lived on what he could pick up, now that for two years past he could hold a brush no longer. Whenever Gervaise saw old Bru trudging about in the snow to warm himself, she called him in, and found a place for him near the stove; and she

would often insist on his eating a piece of bread and cheese. Old Bru, with his round back, his white beard, his wrinkled face, as wrinkled as an old apple, would sit for hours without saying a word, listening to the crackling of the coke. Perhaps he was thinking over his fifty years of work on the ladders, half a century passed in painting the doors and whitening the ceilings from end to end of Paris.

"Well, old Bru," the laundress would sometimes ask him, "what are you thinking about?"

"Nothing, all sorts of things," he would answer, in a dazed way.

The work-women joked him, and declared he must be in love. But he, not hearing them, fell back into his silence, his gloomy, meditative attitude.

From this time Virginie often talked to Gervaise about Lantier. She seemed to take a delight in putting her in mind of her old lover, for the pleasure of embarrassing her by all sorts of suppositions. One day she mentioned that she had met him, and as the laundress remained silent, she said no more; but next day she let slip that he had talked of her a good deal, very affectionately. These conversations, carried on in low voices in a corner of the laundry, always agitated Gervaise. She always felt, at the name of Lantier, a burning sensation at the pit of the stomach, as if the man had left there, under the skin, something of himself. Certainly, she was confident of herself, she had resolved to live an honest woman, because honesty is half of happiness. And she did not think of Coupeau in this matter, having nothing to reproach herself with in his regard, not even in

thought. She thought of the blacksmith, with a certain hesitation and uneasiness of heart. It seemed to her that the return of the memory of Lantier, slowly taking hold of her again, made her untrue to Goujet, to their unspoken love, with its sweet friendship. She was sad at heart when it seemed to her that she was wronging this good friend. She would have had no affection for anyone but him, outside her own household. It was a sort of ideal of hers, quite apart from all the low thoughts that Virginie seemed to be watching and waiting for.

When the spring was come, Gervaise went for refuge to Goujet. She could no longer sit quietly thinking, without her thoughts turning back to her first lover; she saw him leaving Adèle, putting his linen back into their old trunk, coming back to her, with the trunk in the cab. When she went out, she was seized all at once with foolish fears, in the street; she seemed to hear the footsteps of Lantier behind her; she dared not turn, she trembled, fancying that she felt his hands taking her by the waist. He was sure to be spying on her; he would come upon her some day; and the thought gave her a cold sweat, for he would certainly kiss her on the ear as he used to do, to tease her, in the old days. It was this kiss that terrified her; merely to think of it made her deaf, filled her ears with a ringing in which she could only distinguish the beating of her heart, beating loudly. When these fears came over her, the forge was her sole refuge; she breathed freely again under Goujet's protection; the ringing strokes of his hammer set all her bad dreams to flight.

It was her moment of happiness. She took special trouble with her washing at the Rue des Portes-Blanches, and always took it there herself, because the journey gave her a pretext, every Friday, for coming back by way of the Rue Marcadet, and looking in at the forge. The moment she turned the corner of the street she was as light and gay as if she were in the country, there in the midst of those empty spaces framed in with grey factories; the road black with coal, the plumes of steam on the roofs, amused her like a mossy way in a suburban wood, lost in clusters of greenery; and she loved the dim horizon, streaked by the high chimneys of the manufactories, the Butte Montmartre blocking the sky with its chalky houses, pierced with regular rows of windows. As she came near she slackened pace, jumping across puddles, finding a pleasure in picking her way through the deserted corners, heaped up with all the rubbish of a house being pulled down. At the end she could see the glow of the forge, even at mid-day. Her heart leapt to the dance of hammers. When she got there she was all flushed, the little blonde hairs at the back of her neck flying out, like a woman who is coming to a rendez-vous. Goujet awaited her, his arms and chest bare, hammering away louder than usual on the anvil those days, so that she could hear him from a distance. He saw her coming, he welcomed her with his good silent laugh in his golden beard. But she would not have him leave his work, she begged him to go back to his hammer, for she liked him all the more when he brandished his great arms, knotted with muscles.

She went over to Étienne, who was pulling away at the bellows, and gave him a little tap on the cheek, and she stayed there for an hour, looking at the bolts. They did not exchange ten words, but they felt as if their affection for one another could not have expressed itself better in a room by themselves, locked and double-locked. The sneers of Bec-Salé, otherwise Boit-sans-Soif, troubled them not at all; they did not so much as hear them. After a quarter of an hour she began to feel the stifling atmosphere, the heat, the strong odour, the smoke that went up; while the dull blows shook her from head to foot. She wished no otherwise; it was her delight. If Goujet had clasped her in his arms, it would not have given her such a keen emotion. She came near him, to feel the wind of his hammer on her cheek, to feel herself in every blow he struck. When the sparks pricked her sensitive hands, she did not draw them back, she gloated over the rain of fire that lashed her skin. And he realized all her happiness in it; he kept for Friday the most difficult pieces of work, so as to do her homage with all his strength and all his skill; he abandoned himself to the work, as if he would shiver the anvil in two, panting, his veins vibrating with the joy that he gave her. For a whole spring, the love of these two set the forge in motion with a very tempest of toil. It was an idyl in the midst of this immense labour, in the midst of this flaring of oil, this great building that rocked to its foundations, its soot-blackened frame crackling and splitting. And all this iron, moulded like red wax, seemed to bear the rude imprint of

their affection. When the laundress left Gueule-d'Or on these Fridays, she went slowly up the Rue des Poissonniers, happy and at ease, tranquil in mind and body.

Little by little her fear of Lantier diminished; she became herself again. At this period she would have been quite happy but for Coupeau, who was going regularly to the bad. One day, on her way back from the forge, she thought she saw him in old Colombe's "Assommoir," standing drinks with Mes-Bottes, Bibi-la-Grillade, and Bec-Salé, otherwise Boit-sans-Soif. She went by quickly, not wanting to look as if she were spying on them. But she looked back; it was Coupeau, and he was tossing off his little glass of schnaps, with already the movement of one accustomed to it. He had lied to her, then; he had got to brandy by this time. She went home in despair; all her horror of brandy had come back to her. She forgave him for drinking wine, for wine makes the workman strong; spirits, on the other hand, were dreadful things, poisons, taking away from the workman his taste for bread. Ah! the Government ought not to allow these horrible things to be made!

When she reached the Rue de la Goutte-d'Or, she found the whole place in a stir. Her women had left the ironing-board, and were out in the court gazing up in the air. She questioned Clémence.

"It's old Bijard, knocking about his wife," said the girl. "He was waiting in the porch, as drunk as a lord, waiting till she came home from the wash-house. He made her go upstairs, hitting her all the

time, and now he's doing for her, up in the room. There! do you hear her shrieking?"

Gervaise hurried upstairs. She liked Madame Bijard, her washerwoman; she was a very persevering woman. She hoped to be able to put a stop to things. Upstairs, on the sixth floor, the door of the room was wide open, and some of the lodgers were standing outside, exclaiming aloud, while Madame Boche, in the doorway, shouted,—

"Will you give over? I'll send for the policeman, do you hear?"

No one dared go into the room, for they knew Bijard only too well, a regular brute when he was drunk. For that matter, he was never anything but drunk. On the very few days when he went to work, he placed a bottle of brandy by the side of his locksmith's vice, and took a swig at it every half hour. He simply lived on it; he would have taken fire like a torch if one had put a match to his mouth.

"But one can't let her be killed!" said Gervaise, trembling all over.

And she went into the room. It was an attic, very neat, but cold and bare; the man had stripped it of everything, taking the very sheets to get money for his drink. In the scuffle the table had rolled over by the window, the two chairs had been knocked over, and lay upside down on the floor. On the floor, in the middle of the room, Madame Bijard, her skirts still sopping from the wash, clinging tightly to her sides, her hair torn out, her face bleeding, groaned heavily, with a long oh! oh! at every kick. Bijard

had first of all battered her with his fists; now he trampled upon her.

"Ah, you whore! ah, you whore! ah, you whore!" he growled huskily, accompanying every kick with this word, maddened with the repetition, striking harder as his voice grew more incoherent.

Then his voice failed him altogether and he went on kicking out stupidly, furiously, rigid in his workman's tattered jacket and trousers, his face bluish under his matted beard, his bald forehead spotted with great red streaks. The neighbours outside said that he was beating her because she had refused to give him twenty sous, that morning. Boche's voice was heard at the bottom of the staircase calling to Madame Boche,—

"Come here; let them kill each other; it will be a good riddance to bad rubbish."

Old Bru had followed Gervaise into the room. The two of them tried to argue with the locksmith, to get him out of the room. But he turned on them silently, his mouth foaming; the alcohol flamed in in his eyes, a flame of murder. The laundress had her wrist half sprained, the old workman was flung back against the table. On the ground Madame Bijard breathed more heavily, her mouth wide open, her eyes closed. For the moment Bijard's kicks were not reaching her. He went back to it frantically, striking wide, blinded with fury, hitting himself with his own aimless blows. And, through all this uproar, Gervaise saw little four-year-old Lalie, in a corner of the room, watching her father beating her mother to death. The child, as if to protect her, held in her arms her sister Henriette, a little thing just

weaned. She stood there, her head wrapped in a piece of calico, very pale, very serious. And she gazed out of her big black eyes, with a thoughtful fixity, without a tear.

At last Bijard caught his foot against a chair, and fell sprawling on the ground, where he lay and snored. Old Bru helped Gervaise to lift up Madame Bijard, who was now sobbing violently, and Lalie, who had come near, watched her weep, accustomed to it, and resigned already. As the laundress went downstairs, through the house in which quiet had now been restored, she still saw before her the child's look, the look of this child of four, grave and fearless as the look of a woman.

"Monsieur Coupeau is on the pavement opposite," cried Clémence, as soon as she saw her. "He looks jolly boozed!"

Coupeau was just then crossing the street. He stumbled against the door, and nearly sent his shoulder through one of the panels. He was white with drink, his teeth set, his muscles contracted. And Gervaise recognized the brandy of the "Assommoir" in the poison which filtered through his veins and blanched his skin. She was going to laugh and put him to bed, as she was accustomed to do when he was drunk and jolly. But he pushed her away, without opening his lips; and, as he went by, making his way straight to his bed himself, he raised his fist against her. He was like the other, the drunkard who snored upstairs, worn out with his own blows. And she turned cold, thinking of men, her husband, Goujet, Lantier; feeling her heart sink, feeling that she would never be happy any more.

CHAPTER VII

The birthday of Gervaise fell on the 19th of June. The Coupeaus, on their great occasions, piled up the dishes, the small ones in the large ones; you came away from the feast as round as a ball, stuffed for the whole week. There was a general clearing out of all the small change. As soon as the household could scrape together four sous, away they went in something good to eat. Saints' days were always turning up, real or imaginary, always a good excuse for a feed. Virginie approved loudly of Gervaise in her fancy for good things to eat. When a man drinks all you have, it is fools' labour to let everything run away in drink, and not fill your own stomach. Since the money was safe to go, in any case, it was as well to let the butcher have some of it as well as the publican. And Gervaise, with her growing tendency to gormandizing, seized on this as her excuse. It was all Coupeau's fault if they didn't save a brass farthing. She had grown stouter, and she limped more, for her leg, in taking on fat, seemed to have grown shorter in proportion.

That year, the birthday party was talked of a month beforehand. Dishes were thought out, and

lips were licked over them. The whole establishment looked forward to a regular good orgy, something stunning, something quite out of the common; one didn't get the chance every day. The laundress's great anxiety was to know who she should invite; she wished to have twelve guests, neither more nor less. She, her husband, old Madame Coupeau, Madame Lerat, that made four people belonging to the family. Then she would have the Goujets and the Poissons. At first she had decided not to invite the work-women, Madame Putois and Clémence, so as not to make them too familiar; but as there was constant talk about the party before them, and they began to look very glum, she ended by saying that they could come. Four and four, eight, and two, ten. Then, in order to make out the number of twelve, she made friends with the Lorilleux, who had been hovering about her for some time; at least, it was agreed that the Lorilleux were to come down to dinner, and they would all make peace, glass in hand. One really couldn't always keep up a quarrel in one's own family. Then, too, the thought of the party was of a nature to soften all hearts; it was impossible to refuse on such an occasion. Only, when the Boches heard that peace was to be patched up, they too made up to Gervaise with smiles and polite attentions; and they, too, had to be asked to come. So there would be fourteen, without counting the children. Never had she given such a dinner; she was both proud and scared at the thought of it.

The birthday fell on a Monday. It was a stroke of good luck. Gervaise counted on Sunday afternoon

for beginning the cooking. On Saturday, as the workwomen slaved away at their work, there was a long discussion as to what they should have to eat. A single item had been agreed upon for the last three weeks, a roast goose. They had talked it over with greedy eyes, and now the goose had been duly bought. Old Madame Coupeau fetched it for Clémence and Madame Putois to feel the weight of it. There were exclamations, so enormous did the creature look with its rough skin, its flaps of yellow fat.

"Before that the *pot-au-feu*, of course," said Gervaise. "The soup and a little boiled beef; that's always good. Then there must be a dish with sauce."

Clémence proposed rabbit; but that was what one always had; everybody had had their fill of it. Gervaise wanted to think of something more out of the common. Madame Putois having suggested a *blanquette de veau*, they all looked at one another with a communicative smile. It was a fine idea; nothing would be so good as a *blanquette de veau*.

"Then," continued Gervaise, "there must be another dish with sauce."

Old Madame Coupeau suggested fish. But the others made a wry face, and tapped more vigorously than ever with their irons. No one cared for fish; it wasn't digestible, and it was full of bones. The cross-eyed Augustine having ventured to say that she liked skate, Clémence shut her up with a smack on the jaws. Then Gervaise hit upon crackling with potatoes, which had once more lighted up all faces, when Virginie entered like a whirlwind, her face aflame.

"You have come just at the right moment," cried Gervaise. "She must see the animal."

And old Madame Coupeau had to fetch the goose a second time, for Virginie to take in her hands. The devil! it was heavy! But she put it down at once on the ironing-board, between a petticoat and a heap of chemises. She had something else in her head, and she took Gervaise into the next room.

"I say, my child," she whispered hurriedly, "I'll give you warning. You'll never guess who I met at the bottom of the street. Lantier, my dear! He is there prowling about; so I ran to tell you. I was frightened on your account, you know."

The laundress went very pale. What did the wretched man want of her? And just now, when she was in the midst of the preparations for the party. That was always her luck; she couldn't even have a little pleasure in peace. But Virginie replied that she needn't take on in that way. Hang it all! if Lantier had the cheek to follow her, she would simply call a policeman, and have him locked up. Since her husband had got his appointment, she was always taking on lordly airs, and talking of having everybody arrested. As she raised her voice, declaring she wished he would come up to her in the street, merely that she could have the pleasure of taking him to the police-station herself and handing him over to Poisson, Gervaise made a sign to her to be quiet, because the work-women could hear. She went back into the laundry, and continued, with an affectation of calm,—

"Now we must have a vegetable."

"Why not peas with lard?" said Virginie.

"For my part, I should like to eat nothing else."

"Yes, yes, peas with lard!" cried all the others in approval, whilst Augustine, in her enthusiasm, poked the fire more vigorously than ever.

Next day, Sunday, by three o'clock, old Madame Coupeau had lit the two ovens in the house, as well as a third one, in earthenware, borrowed from the Boches. By half-past three, the *pot-au-feu* was boiling in a huge saucepan lent by the restaurant near by, the family saucepan not being big enough. They had decided to cook the *blanquette de veau* and the crackling the day before, because those dishes are all the better for being warmed up; only they would leave the sauce for the *blanquette* to the last moment. There would still be quite enough to do on Monday, the soup, the peas, the roast goose. The room at the back was all illuminated by the three fires; the brown sauce could be smelt in the ovens, with a strong smoke of burnt flour; whilst the big saucepan puffed out clouds of smoke like a boiler, its sides shaken by deep and solemn gurglings. Old Madame Coupeau and Gervaise, each with a white apron on, were all over the place in their haste to chop the parsley, to fetch the salt and pepper, to turn the meat with a wooden skewer. They had turned Coupeau out of doors in order to clear the carpet. But they had plenty of people, all the same, that afternoon. The smell of cooking had spread over the house to such an extent that the neighbours came down, one after the other, on some excuse, simply to find out what was cooking; and they planted themselves there, waiting till the laundress was obliged

to lift the lids of the saucepans. Then, about five, Virginie appeared; she had seen Lantier again; one couldn't put foot in the street now without seeing him. Madame Boche, too, had seen him at the edge of the pavement looking warily round the corner. Thereupon Gervaise, who was just going out for a halfpenny-worth of cooked onions for the *pot-au-feu*, was seized with a fit of trembling, and could not go out, especially as the *concierge* and the sempstress added to her fright by telling her awful stories of men waiting for women with knives and pistols concealed under their coats.

Lord! yes, one read about that in the papers every day; when a blackguard of that kind gets roused by finding an old friend in luck, he is capable of anything. Virginie obligingly offered to run out for the onions. Women must look after one another; the poor dear couldn't be left to be massacred. When she returned, she said that Lantier was nowhere about; he must have cut and run as soon as he saw that he was discovered. However, the conversation around the stoves ran on the subject of Lantier till evening. Madame Boche advised Gervaise to tell Coupeau, but she was terribly frightened, and begged her not to let out a word. A nice situation that would be! Her husband seemed already to have some inkling of it, for these last few days he had cursed and struck the wall with his fists when he went to bed. Her hands trembled at the mere thought of two men getting to blows on her account; she knew Coupeau, he was jealous enough to fall on Lantier with his shears. And all the while, as the four of them talked

over the situation, the sauces simmered gently on the top of the stoves, covered down with ashes; the *blanquette* and the crackling, when old Madame Coupeau took off the cover, made a little noise, a discreet murmur; the *pot-au-feu* still snored like a sleeping chorister basking in the sun. Finally, each dipped up some gravy in a cup, to taste the soup.

At last Monday arrived. Now that Gervaise was going to have fourteen people to dinner, she was afraid she would never be able to seat so many people. She resolved to lay the table in the laundry; and, early in the morning, she measured out the space with a yard measure, to see which way she should place the table. Then the linen had to be cleared away into another room, and the ironing-board taken down; it was the ironing-board, on other trestles, which was to serve as table. Just in the middle of this upset, a customer appeared, and made a scene, because she had been waiting for her linen since Friday; she was not properly treated, she must have her linen at once. Thereupon, Gervaise excused herself, and told a very neat lie; it was not her fault, she was cleaning out the place, the work-people were not coming back till the next day; and she calmed down her customer, and sent her away, promising to attend to her the very first thing. As soon as she had gone, Gervaise burst out into abusive language. If you listened to your customers, sure enough, you would never have time to eat a mouthful; you would slave out your very life for their precious sakes! One wasn't a dog in a leash, any way! If the Grand Turk in person were to come to her with a collar, if she were to gain

a hundred thousand francs by it, she wouldn't do a stroke of ironing that Monday; it was about time she enjoyed herself a bit.

All the morning was spent in completing the purchases. Gervaise went out three times, coming back each time laden like a mule. But, at the moment when she was going out to fetch the wine, she discovered that she had not enough money left. She could get the wine all right on credit, only the house couldn't be left without a penny, on account of the thousand little expenses that are sure to crop up. And, in the back room, old Madame Coupeau and she were in despair, calculating that they needed at least twenty francs. Where were they to raise them? Old Madame Coupeau, who had formerly worked for a little actress at the Théâtre des Batignolles, was the first to suggest the pawn-shop. Gervaise gave a sigh of relief. How stupid of her! She had never thought of it. She hastily wrapped up her black silk dress inside a towel, which she pinned up. Then she herself hid away the bundle under old Madame Coupeau's apron, adjuring her to keep it flat out, on account of the neighbours, who had no business to know anything about it; and she went out to the door, and gave a look round, to see that no one followed the old woman. But she had only got as far as the coal-dealer's, when Gervaise called her back.

"Mother! mother!"

And she made her come into the shop, and took off her wedding ring, saying,—

"Here, take that too. It will bring in more."

When old Madame Coupeau came back with

twenty-five francs, she danced for joy. She would order six bottles of better wine, to drink with the roast. Wouldn't the Lorilleux be taken down a peg!

To take the Lorilleux down a peg had been the dream of the Coupeaus for the last fortnight. Didn't those mean objects, the husband and wife—a nice couple they were—shut themselves up whenever they had anything nice to eat, as if they had stolen it? Why, they blocked up the window with a quilt, to hide the light, and look as if they had gone to bed. Naturally, that kept people from coming up; and they stuffed as hard as ever they could, talking under their breath so as not to be heard. Then, the next day, they took care not to throw the bones on the dust-heap, for fear people would see what they had been eating; Madame Lorilleux went to the other end of the street, and threw them down a drain. One morning Gervaise had come upon her as she was emptying out a basketful of oyster-shells. No, indeed, these close-fisted creatures were as narrow as narrow could be, and they resorted to all these manœuvres in order to make out that they were poor. Well, they should have a good lesson, they should see that other people were not the mere dirt beneath their feet. Gervaise would like to have laid her table in the street, and invited all the passers. Money wasn't made to get musty: it is a nice thing to see it brand-new and shining. She was so little like them that if she had only twenty sous, she wanted people to think she had forty.

Old Madame Coupeau and Gervaise talked of the Lorilleux from the time they began to lay the

table at three o'clock. They had hung up great curtains over the windows, but, as it was hot, they left the door open, and the whole street could watch the proceedings. The two women could not place a decanter, a bottle, a salt-cellar, without endeavouring to make it somehow annoying to the Lorilleux. They had arranged their seats so that they could best see the superb array of the spread; and they gave them the best plate, knowing that their china would quite overwhelm them.

"No, no, mother!" cried Gervaise, "don't give them those serviettes! I have two diaper ones."

"Good!" murmured the old woman. "They will die of envy!"

And they smiled at each other as they stood at each end of the table, where they gazed with pride at the covers laid for fourteen. It was like a little chapel in the midst of the shop.

"And the thieves they are, too!" continued Gervaise. "Do you remember what a lie they told last month, when the wife told everybody that she had lost a bit of chain on her way back with the work? As if they ever lost anything! It was simply a way to pretend they were in straits, and so not give you your hundred sous."

"I never saw my hundred sous but twice," said old Madame Coupeau.

"I'll bet you anything, next month they'll invent a similar story. That explains why they stop up the window when they eat rabbit. Don't you see, people might say: 'Since you can afford to eat rabbit, you can well afford to give a hundred sous to your

mother.' Oh, they are a bad lot! What would have become of you, I wonder, if I had not taken you in?"

Old Madame Coupeau shook her head. Just then she was dead against the Lorilleux, on account of the great feast that the Coupeaus were giving. She was fond of cooking, of gossipping over saucepans, of the general stir about the house when there is a party in the air. Besides, she usually got on well enough with Gervaise. At other times, when they came to words, as will always happen sometimes, the old woman sulked, and declared she was very badly off indeed to be at the mercy of her daughter-in-law. And no doubt she had still a certain affection for Madame Lorilleux; after all, she was her daughter.

"Well!" went on Gervaise, "you wouldn't be so well fed with them, eh? No coffee, no snuff, no dainties at all! I say! do you think they would have put two mattresses on your bed?"

"No indeed," replied old Madame Coupeau. "When they are coming in, I'll go opposite to the door to see what a face they'll make."

The face the Lorilleux were going to make tickled them only to think of. But it would never do to stand there gazing at the table. The Coupeaus had *déjeuner* very late, about one; just something brought in from the pork-butcher's; for the three ovens were already in use, and they did not want to soil the knives and forks that were ready for the evening. By four o'clock the cooking was at its height. The goose roasted before a roasting-stove placed on the ground by the wall near the open

window; and the creature was so big that it had to be thrust into the roaster by main force. The cross-eyed Augustine sat on a little footstool in the full blaze of the fire, and solemnly basted the goose with a long-handled spoon. Gervaise was busy over the peas. Old Madame Coupeau, quite losing her head amidst all these dishes, waited to put the crackling and the *blanquette* to warm. About five o'clock the guests began to arrive. First came the two work-women, Clémence and Madame Putois, both in their Sunday best; the former in blue, the latter in black. Clémence was carrying a geranium, Madame Putois a heliotrope, and Gervaise, who had just then her hands all white with flour, had to give them two big kisses each, her hands behind her back. Then, on their very heels, came Virginie, quite the lady in her flowered muslin; she had put on her scarf and hat, though she had only had to come the distance of the street. She brought with her a pot of carnations. She seized the laundress in her great arms, and gave her a good squeeze. Finally, Boche made his appearance with a pot of pansies, Madame Boche with a pot of mignonette, Madame Lerat with a pot of garden mint, the earth of which had soiled her dress of violet merino. They all kissed one another, crowding into the room with its three fires and the roasting-stove, which gave out a perfectly stifling heat, the noise of the frying almost drowning the voices. Somebody's dress caught in the roaster, and gave everybody quite a turn. The smell of the goose came out so strongly that it made their mouths all water. And Gervaise was as amiable as could be, thanking everyone for

their bouquet, without ceasing to prepare the sauce for the *blanquette* at the bottom of a soup plate. She had put the flower-pots in the laundry, at the end of the table, without taking off the white paper in which they were wrapped up. A sweet perfume of flowers mingled with the smell of cooking.

"Shall I help you?" said Virginie. "To think that you have been working away at all this food for the last three days, and that we are going to clear it all up in less than no time!"

"Gracious!" replied Gervaise, "one couldn't do that all by one's self. No, you will soil your hands. You see, everything is ready. There is only the soup."

At that they began to take off their things. They put their shawls and bonnets on the bed, then pinned up their skirts, so as not to soil them. Boche, who had sent his wife to look after the lodge till dinner-time, sent Clémence almost into the stove by asking her if she was ticklish; and Clémence writhed and doubled herself up till her stays cracked, for the mere idea of tickling sent little shivers all over her. The other women, so as not to be in the way of the cooks, had also gone into the laundry, where they stood about by the walls, over against the table, but as the conversation still continued through the open door, and sometimes they could not hear one another, they were for ever going into the back room, filling the place with the echoes of their voices, crowding about Gervaise, who forgot to answer them, her spoon steaming away in her hand. They laughed and joked, pretty strong jokes some of them. Virginie having

said that she had eaten nothing for the last two days in order to leave room, the outrageous Clémence related a stiffer tale than that; she had cleaned herself out with a clyster, like the English. Thereupon Boche gave a recipe for helping you to digest at once; that is, to squeeze yourself in a door after each course; that, too, was used by the English; it allowed you to go on eating for twelve hours running, without your stomach getting out of order. And one is bound to eat, in common politeness, when one is asked out to dinner. You don't set veal, and pork, and goose before dogs. Oh! the lady of the house might set her mind at rest; they were going to clean out her plates so thoroughly that she wouldn't need to wash them in the morning. And the whole company seemed to be whetting their appetite by sniffing at the stoves and the roaster. The women were like young things; they played at touch, and ran from one room to the other, making the boards shake under them, stirring and spreading the smell of cooking with the wind of their petticoats, in a very uproar, the sound of their laughter joining in the noise of old Madame Coupeau's chopper, chopping up the lard.

Goujet made his appearance just at the moment when they were all jumping and shouting for fun. He was afraid to come in; and he stood there, timidly, holding a great white rose-tree in his arms, a magnificent plant, which came up to his eyes, and twined flowers in his yellow beard. Gervaise ran to him with her flaming cheeks, all on fire with the heat of the stoves. But he could not get rid of his flower-pot; and when she had taken it out of his hands, he

stammered, not daring to give her a kiss. She had to go on tiptoe, and put her cheek up to his lips; and even then he was so agitated that he kissed her on the eye, and nearly put out her eye with his kiss. Both stood trembling.

"Oh! Monsieur Goujet, it is too lovely!" she said, putting the rose-tree by the side of the other flowers, which it overtopped with its whole feathery cluster of foliage.

"Not at all, not at all," he said, not knowing what to say.

Then, heaving a great sigh, he became more composed, and announced that it was no use expecting his mother; she had the sciatica again. Gervaise was quite distressed; she talked of putting aside a piece of goose, for Madame Goujet absolutely must eat some of the creature. Meanwhile, all the guests had come. Coupeau was probably about somewhere, near by, with Poisson, whom he had called for after *déjeuner;* they were sure not to be late, they had promised to be back by six sharp. Then, as the soup was nearly ready, Gervaise called to Madame Lerat, telling her it was time to go and fetch the Lorilleux. Madame Lerat immediately looked very serious; it was she who had conducted all negotiations, and agreed with both parties as to how things were to go. She put on her shawl and bonnet, and went upstairs, holding herself erect, with an air of great importance. Down below, the laundress went on stirring the soup, *pâtes d'Italie*, without saying a word. The whole company, sobered all at once, waited solemnly.

Madame Lerat was the first to reappear. She

had gone round by way of the street, so as to give more ceremony to the reconciliation. She held the laundry-door wide open whilst Madame Lorilleux, in her silk dress, stopped on the threshold. All the guests had risen, and Gervaise came forward and kissed her sister-in-law as they had agreed, saying,—

"Come in, then. It's all over now, isn't it? We are both going to be nice to one another."

To which Madame Lorilleux replied,—

"I only hope things will continue so for always."

When she had come in, Lorilleux also paused on the threshold, and waited to be embraced before coming inside. Neither had brought a bouquet; they had decided not to, considering that it would look too subservient to the Clop-clop if they arrived with flowers the very first time. Meanwhile Gervaise called to Augustine to bring out two bottles. Then, on the end of the table, she poured out glasses and summoned everybody. Each took a glass, and they drank to the good friendship of the family. There was a silence as the whole company drank, and the women raised their elbows and drained the glass at one draught.

"There is nothing better before soup," said Boche, clicking his tongue. "It is better than a kick in the backside."

Old Madame Coupeau had placed herself opposite to the door, in order to suit what sort of a face the Lorilleux would pull. She pulled at Gervaise's skirt, and led her into the back room. And the two of them, bending above the soup, talked rapidly in low voices.

"Well, what a face!" said the old woman. "You couldn't see them, of course, but I could! When she caught sight of the table, look here! her face went like that; the corners of her mouth went up to her very eyes; and as for him, he was so taken aback, it set him off coughing. Look at them now; their mouths are so dry, they're eating their lips."

"It is really painful to see people so envious as all that," murmured Gervaise.

And indeed the Lorilleux looked very queer. No one, certainly, likes to be taken down a peg; and in a family especially, when one succeeds, the others are furious, it is natural enough. Only one keeps it in; one doesn't display it for everyone to see. But the Lorilleux couldn't keep it in. It was more than they could do; they looked askance and thoroughly put out. Indeed, it was so visible, that the other guests looked at them, and asked if they were quite well. Never could they stomach that table laid for fourteen, the white tablecloth, the bread ready cut. It really had the air of a first-class restaurant. Madame Lorilleux went all round the room, looking aside so as not to see the flowers; and she stealthily fingered the great tablecloth, tormented by the idea that it must be new.

"Here we are!" cried Gervaise, reappearing, her face all smiles, her sleeves turned up, her hair in little blonde fluffs around her forehead.

The guests drew near the table. They were all hungry, and they yawned a little, and looked bored.

"If the master were here," said the laundress, "we might begin."

"Well, well," said Madame Lorilleux, "the soup

has time to cool. Coupeau is always late. You mustn't let him give us the slip."

It was already half-past six. The things were beginning to burn; the goose would be too much done. Thereupon, Gervaise, in distress, spoke of sending someone out to look for Coupeau in the neighbouring wine-shops. Then, as Goujet offered, she said she would go too; Virginie, anxious on her husband's account, accompanied them. The three of them, all bare-headed, took up the whole pavement. The blacksmith, in his frock-coat, had Gervaise on his left arm and Virginie on his right; he was nicely sandwiched, he said, and the idea seemed to them so droll that they stopped to laugh, their legs shaking under them. They looked at themselves in the pork-butcher's glass, and laughed all the more. By the side of Goujet, all in black, the two women looked like gay girls tricked out in all their finery, the sempstress with her pink-flowered muslin, the laundress with her white cotton cambric with blue spots, her wrists bare, a little grey silk scarf around her neck. Everybody turned to see them pass, so gay and fresh and Sundayish on a week-day, making their way through the crowd which blocked up the Rue des Poissonniers this warm fine evening. But it was no joking business. They went up to the door of every wine-shop, and craned their necks to look in, and see who was inside. Was the creature gone to get his drop of drink at the Arc-de-Triomphe? They had already gone all along the upper part of the street, looking at every likely corner: the "Petite Civette," renowned for its prunes; at old Madame Baquet's, who sold

Orléans wine at eight sous; at the "Papillon," a favourite place for cabmen, who are hard to please. No Coupeau. Then, as they went down towards the boulevard, Gervaise, on passing François', the eating-house at the corner, gave a little cry.

"What is it?" asked Goujet.

The laundress no longer laughed. She had gone quite white, and she was so overcome that she nearly fell. Virginie understood in an instant, when she saw, inside François', Lantier sitting at one of the tables, quietly having his dinner. The two women hurried on the blacksmith.

"I turned my ankle," said Gervaise, as soon as she could speak.

At the bottom of the street they discovered Coupeau and Poisson in the "Assommoir," old Colombe's. They were standing inside, in the midst of a crowd of men; Coupeau, in a grey blouse, was shouting out, with furious gesticulations, bringing down his fist on the counter; Poisson, who was not on duty that day, buttoned up in an old brown overcoat, was listening with his grim and silent aspect, ruffling his red moustache and imperial. Goujet, leaving the women outside, went in and put his hand on the zinc-worker's shoulder. But when the latter saw Gervaise and Virginie outside, he lost his temper. What did he want with women like that coming after him? Always petticoats after him! All right, he wasn't going to budge; they could eat their beastly dinner by themselves. Goujet, to quiet him, had to have a drink with him, and even after that he insisted on dawdling five minutes longer

by the bar. When at length he came out, he said to his wife,—

"None of that, now. I can look after my own business, do you understand?"

She said nothing. She was trembling all over. Evidently she had been talking of Lantier with Virginie, for the latter pushed her husband towards Goujet, and told them to walk first. The two women put themselves on each side of the zinc-worker, to distract his attention, and keep him from seeing. He was scarcely the worse for drink, intoxicated by the sound of his own voice rather than by what he had drunk. As they seemed to wish to keep on the left side of the pavement, he jostled them, out of mere obstinacy, and insisted on crossing to the other side. They followed him in a great fright, and tried to prevent him from seeing into François'. But Coupeau seemed to be aware that Lantier was there, and Gervaise was simply stupefied when he began to growl,—

"Yes, yes, my ducky, there's a chap there we know, don't we? Do you take me for a flat? Just let me catch you at it again, with your eyes in your elbows!"

And he began calling her names. It wasn't him she was looking for, with her fly-away get-up and her powdered cheeks; it was that old pimp of hers. Then, all of a sudden, he was seized with a mad rage against Lantier. Sot and scoundrel! one of the two had better clear out the other, and pretty soon, too! Lantier seemed to take no notice, and went on quietly eating his *veau à l'oseille*. People began to collect,

and Virginie finally dragged Coupeau away; he calmed down the minute he had turned the corner. All the same, the party returned less gaily than it had set out.

The guests were waiting all around the table, drawing long faces. The zinc-worker shook hands with everybody, putting on airs and graces before the ladies. Gervaise, with a certain constraint, told the guests where to sit, in a low voice. All at once she noticed that, as Madame Goujet was not coming, there would be one seat vacant, next to Madame Lorilleux.

"We shall be thirteen at table!" she said, in consternation, finding a new omen of the misfortune which for some time past had seemed to be approaching.

The women, who had already taken their places, rose in some confusion. Madame Putois offered to leave the company, for, to her thinking, it was not right to trifle with such matters; besides, she could eat nothing, every mouthful would stick in her throat. As for Boche, he declared with a laugh that it was better to be thirteen than fourteen; they would all get bigger helpings; that was all.

"Wait a minute!" said Gervaise. "I'll soon put that to rights."

And she went outside and called to old Bru, who was just then crossing the street. The old workman came in, stiff and bowed with age, saying not a word.

"Sit you down, my good man," said the laundress. "You'll take some dinner with us, won't you?"

He simply nodded. He was quite willing; it was all the same to him.

"He'll do as well as anybody else," she continued, lowering her voice. "He doesn't often have a good meal. He shall have a treat for once in his life. Now we shall have no scruples in stuffing!"

Goujet's eyes filled with tears; he was deeply touched. The others all gave their approval, declaring that it would bring them all good luck. However, Madame Lorilleux did not seem to relish being so near the old man; she drew herself away, casting looks of disgust on his horny hands, his patched and faded blouse. Old Bru sat with bowed head, much exercised by the serviette which lay on his plate. At last he took it up and laid it carefully on the edge of the table, without thinking of putting it on his knees.

Meanwhile Gervaise served the soup, the *pâtes d'Italie*, and the guests had taken up their spoons, when Virginie cried out that Coupeau had disappeared. Very likely he had gone back to old Colombe's. There was a general murmur of disapproval. This time, anyway, no one was going to run after him, he could stay in the street if he wasn't hungry. And as the spoons were scraping up the last drops of the soup, Coupeau reappeared, with two flower-pots, one under each arm, a stock and a balsamine. The whole table applauded. He placed the pots one on each side of Gervaise's glass with a flourish; then he bent down and kissed her.

"I had forgotten you, ducky. No matter, we love each other just the same, especially on a day like this!"

"Monsieur Coupeau 's in good form to-night,"

whispered Clémence in Boche's ear. "He has had just enough to put him in a good temper."

The master's agreeable way had restored the good spirits of the company, which, but just before, had been endangered. Gervaise, now herself again, was as smiling as ever. The guests had finished their soup, and the bottles were passed round; the first glass of wine was drunk, a thimbleful of neat wine, to settle the *pâtes d'Italie*. In the next room the children were heard quarrelling. There was Étienne, Nana, Pauline, and little Victor Fauconnier. A table had been put there for the four of them, and they had been told they must be very good. The cross-eyed Augustine, who was looking after the fires, had to hold her plate on her knees.

"Mamma! mamma!" cried Nana, all of a sudden, "Augustine is dropping her bread in the roaster."

The laundress rushed in, and surprised her swallowing a piece of bread and butter dipped in the boiling fat, nearly scalding her throat in her hurry. She boxed her ears, for the mischievous imp declared she was doing nothing of the sort.

Afrer the beef came the *blanquette*, in a salad-bowl, the household not having a dish big enough; and it was received with a shout of laughter.

"This is becoming serious," said Poisson, who rarely spoke.

It was half-past seven. They had closed the door of the shop, so as not to have all the neighbours spying upon them; the little watchmaker opposite stared at them with eyes like saucers, watching every

mouthful with so greedy a look that they couldn't go on eating. The curtains hung over the windows gave a clear white light without a shadow, bathing the white table, with its knives and forks still in neat order, its flower-pots in their paper frills; and this pale, lingering twilight gave to the company a sort of air of distinction. Virginie found the right word. She looked all round the room, closed in and hung with muslin, and declared that it was quite cosy. When a cart passed in the street, the glasses clattered on the table, and the women had to shout as loud as the men. But there was not much talking, everyone was on his best behaviour, a little formal. Coupeau alone wore his blouse, "because," said he, "one doesn't mind with friends, and besides the blouse is the workman's garb of honour." The women were all tightly laced, and their hair was plastered down with pomade so that it shone like mirrors, whilst the men, sitting well out from the table, held themselves erect, and kept their elbows square, for fear of soiling their frock-coats.

Heavens! what a hole they made in the *blanquette!* If there was not much talking, there was plenty of eating. The salad-bowl was emptying; it had a spoon planted in the midst of the thick sauce, a fine yellow sauce which quivered like jelly. Everyone fished out bits of veal, and the salad-bowl went travelling continuously from hand to hand, all eyes bent over it, looking for mushrooms. The great rolls of bread standing against the wall behind the guests seemed to melt away. Between the mouthfuls one could hear the sound of glasses as they were

put down on the table. The sauce was a little too salt, it required four bottles to drown the blessed *blanquette*, which melted in your mouth like cream, and felt like a fire in your insides. And there was no breathing-space, for the crackling, laid out on a soup-plate, and surrounded by potatoes, arrived in a cloud of steam. There was a shout. The devil! it was the very thing! It was just what everybody liked. Now for a good appetite; and all followed the dish with longing eyes, wiping their knives on their bread in order to be ready. When they were served, they jogged one another's elbows, talking with their mouths full. Eh! isn't the crackling just nobby? it's soft and it's solid all at once, and it trickles down your inside, down to your very heels. The potatoes were stunning. It wasn't at all too salt, but, on account of the potatoes, one had to rinse out one's mouth every minute or so. So they had to wet their whistles with four more bottles. The plates were so thoroughly cleaned that they did not need to be changed for the peas with lard. Oh! vegetables were a mere nothing; one could swallow them by the spoonful, without thinking anything of it. It was a delicacy, certainly, the sort of thing, in short, "that pleases the ladies." What was best in the peas were the bits of bacon, which were done to a turn, till they stank like a horse's hoof. This time two bottles were enough.

"Mamma! mamma!" cried Nana suddenly, "Augustine is putting her hands in my plate."

"Don't bother me; give her a slap!" replied Gervaise, gobbling down her peas.

At the children's table in the next room, Nana was acting as the lady of the house. She was sitting beside Victor, and she had put her brother Étienne to sit by little Pauline; they played at keeping house; they were like newly-married people on a pleasure party. At first Nana had served her guests quite prettily, with the little airs and graces of a grown-up person; but now she had given way to her fondness for bacon, and kept all the bits for herself. The cross-eyed Augustine, who prowled about the children's table, seized the excuse for taking them away from her bodily, under the pretext of dividing them round more fairly. Nana was furious, and bit her on the wrist.

"All right!" muttered Augustine, "I'll tell your mother that after the *blanquette* you told Victor to give you a kiss."

But quiet was restored as Gervaise and old Madame Coupeau made their appearance to unhook the goose. The guests at the large table, took deep breaths, lying back in their chairs. The men unbuttoned their waistcoats, the women wiped their faces with their serviettes. The feast was momentarily interrupted; but a few of them, their jaws working unconsciously, went on swallowing great mouthfuls of bread. They waited, letting the food settle. Night had gradually come on; a dull, ashen light now made its way through the curtains. When Augustine placed two lamps on the table, one at each end, the disorder of the things was plainly visible, the greasy plates and knives, the table-cloth stained with wine and covered with bread-crumbs. A stifling

Chapter VII

Then a general shout arose, through which pierced the shrill voices of the children, jumping for joy. And there was a triumphal entry: Gervaise carried the goose with outstretched arms, her face covered with sweat and beaming with smiles; the women followed her, smiling as well.

L. QUARANTE

odour rose all around. However, at certain hot whiffs, all sniffed in the direction of the kitchen.

"Shall I help you?" cried Virginie.

She left her seat and went into the next room. All the women followed her, one by one. They stood around the roaster, gazing with profound curiosity at Gervaise and old Madame Coupeau, who were extricating the goose. Then a general shout arose, through which pierced the shrill voices of the children, jumping for joy. And there was a triumphal entry: Gervaise carried the goose with outstretched arms, her face covered with sweat and beaming with smiles; the women followed her, smiling as well; whilst Nana, at the very end, her eyes staring their widest, stood on tip-toe to have a look. When the goose was on the table, huge and golden and running with gravy, it was not begun upon all at once. A sort of respectful wonderment had silenced every tongue. There were winks and nods, as everybody pointed it out to everybody. What a devilish fine fat beast it was! what legs! what a breast!

"That didn't fatten itself by licking the walls, I should say," said Boche.

Thereupon there were endless details about the creature. Gervaise stated the facts; it was the best that was to be found at the poulterer's in the Faubourg Poissonnière; it weighed twelve pounds and a half by the coal-dealer's scales; it had taken a bushel of coals to cook; and it had made three bowls-full of dripping.

Virginie interrupted her to boast of having seen the creature before it was cooked.

"You could have eaten it as it was," she said; "it's skin was so fine and white, a regular blonde's skin."

All the men laughed, and smacked their lips with a knowing air. Meanwhile, Lorilleux and his wife drew a long face, filled with envy at seeing such a goose on the Clop-clop's table.

"Well, come now!" said the laundress at last, "we can't eat it as it is. Who is going to carve? No, no, not me! It is too big; it frightens me."

Coupeau offered. Lord! it was simple enough; you take it limb by limb, you pull, it turns out all right. But they cried out, and took the carving-knife out of his hands by force; when he carved, he turned the dish into a perfect cemetery. For a moment they looked round to see who would be willing. Then Madame Lerat said in an amiable tone,—

"It is Monsieur Poisson's job, certainly, Monsieur Poisson's."

And as the company did not seem to see the point, she added, more conciliatory than ever,—

"Monsieur Poisson, of course; he is accustomed to the use of arms."

And she passed him the carving-knife which she held in her hands. The whole company laughed approvingly, and Poisson bowed with military stiffness, and set the goose before him. His neighbours, Gervaise and Madame Boche, moved away a little, so as to leave him elbow-room. He carved deliberately, with great sweeping movements, his eyes fixed on the creature as if to nail it to the bottom of the dish. When he stuck his knife into the carcase, which

crackled, Lorilleux was seized with an access of patriotism. He cried,—

"Ah! if it were only a Cossack!"

"Have you ever fought with Cossacks, Monsieur Poisson?" asked Madame Boche.

"No, with Bedouins," replied the policeman, as he separated a wing. "There are no more Cossacks."

Then there was a profound silence. Necks were craned out, all eyes following the movements of the knife. Poisson was preparing a little surprise. Suddenly he gave a last stroke; the hind-quarters split open and stood erect, the rump in the air; it was "the parson's nose." There was a burst of admiration. It was only old soldiers who could make themselves so agreeable in company. Meanwhile the goose had let a flood of gravy run out of the gaping orifice; and Boche began to laugh.

"I'll stand in," he murmured, "if anyone'll do it into my mouth like that."

"Oh! the dirty beast!" cried the women. "He is a dirty beast!"

"I never met such a disgusting man!" said Madame Boche, more furious than the rest. "Will you be quiet! You would make a trooper blush. You know he sticks at nothing."

At this moment Clémence was heard crying out emphatically,—

"Monsieur Poisson, listen! Monsieur Poisson, you will keep the rump for me, won't you?"

"My dear, the rump is yours by right," said Madame Lerat, in her discreetly venturesome manner.

Meanwhile the goose was all carved. The

policeman, after having allowed the company to admire the parson's nose for several minutes, had cut up the bits, and ranged them all round the dish. Now they could help themselves. But the women, beginning to unbutton their bodices, complained of the heat. Coupeau declared that his house was his own, and he didn't care a damn for the neighbours; and he threw the door wide open. The feast went on to the accompaniment of the rumbling of vehicles and the trampling of feet on the pavements. Now their jaws were rested, they had more room inside, and they set to once more on the dinner, falling furiously to work on the goose. Merely to see the creature being carved, said that inveterate joker Boche, all the *blanquette* and crackling had gone down into his calves.

And now there was a fine set-to indeed; and no one of all the company remembered to have ever had such an indigestion on his conscience. Gervaise stuffed mightily, eating great chunks of white, not saying a word for fear of losing a mouthful; she was a little ashamed for Goujet to see her like that, as greedy as a cat. Goujet, however, was too busy eating away on his own account to notice that she was getting redder and redder with cramming. Then, *gourmande* as she was, she was so nice and good all the same! She never spoke a word, but she interrupted herself at every moment to look after old Bru, and to put something dainty on his plate. It was quite touching to see her pick out a bit of the wing, halfway to her mouth, and give it to the old man, who seemed unable to distinguish between one piece and another, and who swallowed everything, his head bowed, dazed

with so much eating, he whose palate had lost the taste of food. The Lorilleux vented all their rage on the roast; they ate enough to last three days; they would have swallowed up dish and plate and laundry if they could, to have ruined the Clop-clop straight away. All the women wanted some of the breast; it was the ladies' part. Madame Lerat, Madame Boche, and Madame Putois scraped the bones, whilst old Madame Coupeau, who adored the neck, picked at the meat with her two last teeth. Virginie loved the skin when it was brown, and all the men passed her their skin in the most gallant manner, till Poisson cast severe looks at her, telling her to give over, that was quite enough; once already she had eaten too much roast goose, and was laid up in bed for a fortnight, her stomach all in disorder. But Coupeau was quite angry and passed Virginie a part of the leg, crying out that if she didn't scrape it clean—blast it all!—she wasn't worth her salt. As if goose had ever hurt anyone! On the contrary, goose was good for the liver. You could eat it by itself, like dessert. He could stuff all night, without being a penny the worse; and by way of boast, he thrust a whole chunk into his mouth. Meanwhile Clémence finished her rump, sucking it with a gurgle of the lips, and screwing about on her chair in a paroxysm of laughter at the smutty stories that Boche whispered in her ear. Oh Lord! it was a tightener, sure enough! When you're at it, you're at it, eh? and if you only get a good tuck-in now and again, you would be a blooming flat not to stuff yourself up to the ears when you got a chance. Why, you could see the corpora-

tions getting larger every minute! The women were big enough to burst—damned lot of gluttons that they were!—with their open mouths, their chins bedabbled with grease; they had faces for all the world like backsides, and so red too, that you would say they were rich people's belongings, rich people bursting with prosperity.

And the wine too, my friends, the wine flowed round about the table as the water flows in the Seine. It was like a stream after the rain, when the soil is athirst. Coupeau lifted the bottle up when he poured it out, to see the red stream foam; and when a bottle was empty, he would wring its neck, for a joke, with the movement of a woman who is milking a cow. They had cracked another black girl's neck! And in a corner of the laundry the heap of black girls grew larger and larger, a very cemetery of bottles, on the top of which they threw the leavings on the cloth. Madame Putois, having asked for some water, the zinc-worker indignantly got up and removed the water bottles from the table. Right-minded people didn't drink water! No Adam's ale to be had there! And the glasses were drained at a gulp; one heard the sound of the liquid as it was gulped down, like the noise of rain water down a water-pipe on a pouring day. It rained wine, a thin wine which tasted a bit of the cask at first; but you soon get jolly well used to it, and then you found it nutty enough. Devil take it all! the Jesuits might say what they like, the fruit of the vine was a famous find all the same! The company laughed approval; for the workman, sure enough, could never have lived without wine, and

Father Noah, without a doubt, planted the vine on purpose for zinc-workers, tailors, and blacksmiths. Wine brightened you up, and rested you after your work; it stirred you up if you weren't inclined to work; and if the joker did you now and then, well, Lord! the king wasn't your uncle, you had all Paris before you. As if, too, the workman, penniless and downtrodden and despised as he was, had so much fun in his life that anyone had a right to complain if he got a bit boozed now and again, and all just for the sake of seeing things look rosy for once in a while. Why, now, for example, who cared a twopenny damn for the Emperor? Very likely the Emperor himself was tight; that was all very well. Who cared a twopenny damn for the Emperor? Let him get more tight still, and he'd have more of a spree. *That* for the swells! Coupeau sent everybody to the deuce. Women for him, he said; and he slapped his pocket, in which three sous jingled, laughing as if he had five-franc pieces in his purse. Goujet himself, usually so sober, was a bit screwed. Boche's eyes seemed to shrink up, and Lorilleux's went paler than ever, whilst Poisson's bronzed, soldierly face looked more and more severe every moment. They were all perfectly drunk. And the women, too, were a trifle elevated; oh! a mere bit of breeziness, cheeks flushed, and a sort of necessity of taking off things; only Clémence began to be not quite decent. All at once Gervaise remembered the six bottles of better wine; she had forgotten to serve them with the goose. She went and fetched them, and the glasses were filled. Then Poisson rose, glass in hand, and said,—

"I drink to the health of the lady of the house."

There was a scraping of chairs, and the whole company rose to their feet; they clinked glasses in the midst of a regular uproar.

"Fifty years from now," cried Virginie.

"No, no," cried Gervaise, smiling, and half overcome, "I should be too old. A time is sure to come when one is glad enough to be taken."

Meanwhile, through the open door, the whole neighbourhood gazed at the feast, shared in it almost. Passers-by stopped as the light from the open door came across their path, and laughed good naturedly, to see these people eat so heartily. The cabmen bowed on their seats, whipping up their nags, looked in and made jokes: "I say, how much do you pay? Mother, shall I fetch the midwife?" And the smell of the goose was a delight to the whole street; the grocer's boys opposite felt that they were actually eating it; the fruiterer and the tripe-seller, every other minute, came and stood outside the shop, sniffing and licking their lips. The whole street was positively in a state of indigestion. Madame Cudorge and her daughter, the umbrella-sellers near by, who were never seen outside, crossed the road, one behind the other, looking out of the corners of their eyes, as red as if they had been making pancakes. The little watchmaker, sitting at his work-board, could work no longer, drunk with the bottles he had counted, quite off his head in the midst of all his gay clocks. "The neighbours are full of it!" cried Coupeau. What was the good of hiding out of sight? The company were no longer ashamed to be seen at table; on the

contrary, they gloated over all this greedy crowd which had gathered in their honour; they would gladly have taken down the shop-front, and shoved the table out into the street, and so had their dessert out there, under the very nose of the public, in the very crush of the pavement. They weren't such a sight, eh? Besides, they needn't be selfish enough to shut themselves away. Coupeau, taking pity on the poor thirsting watchmaker across the way, held up to him a bottle from a distance; and as the other nodded vigorously, he took him the bottle and a glass. They were all on friendly terms now, the street and they. They drank to the health of the passers-by. They called out to those who seemed good fellows. The feasting spread and spread, till the whole quarter of the Goutte-d'Or scented the grub, and held their sides in a very hell of a racket.

For a minute or two Madame Vigouroux, the coal-dealer, had been passing and repassing before the door.

"Hi! Madame Vigouroux! Madame Vigouroux!" howled the company.

She entered, with a silly laugh, her face shining with soap; she was plump enough to burst her stays. The men liked to pinch her, for they could pinch her all over without ever finding a bone. Boche made her sit down beside him; and immediately, in his sly way, took hold of her knee under the table. But she was quite used to it, and she placidly drank her glass of wine, telling how the neighbours were all at their windows, and the people of the house were getting quite cross about it.

"Oh, as for that, that is our affair," said Madame Boche. "We are the *concierges*, and we can answer for things being in good order. Let them complain to us; we'll give them a nice reception."

In the back room a furious quarrel had broken out between Nana and Augustine, apropos of the roaster, which both wanted to scrape out. For a quarter of an hour it had been banged backwards and forwards on the floor, sounding out like an old saucepan. Now Nana was attending to little Victor, who had a bone stuck in his throat; she stuck her fingers under his chin, and made him swallow big lumps of sugar as medicine. All the same she kept her eye on the large table, and came at every moment to ask for wine, bread, or meat, for Étienne and Pauline.

"Here, take it and have done with it!" cried her mother. "Will you leave me in peace?"

The children could eat no more, but they stuffed all the same, banging their forks to a hymn-tune so as to rouse themselves.

In the midst of the uproar a conversation had started between old Bru and old Madame Coupeau. The old man, livid white with eating and drinking, talked of his sons who were killed in the Crimea. Ah! if they had only lived he wouldn't be in want of his daily bread. But old Madame Coupeau, speaking a little thick, and nodding her head on one side, answered,—

"Ah! but children give a deal of trouble. Look at me now, you might think I was happy enough here; well, I have had cause to weep more than once. No, no, don't wish for children."

Old Bru shook his head.

"They won't have me to work anywhere," he murmured, "I am too old. When I go to a workshop the young people laugh at me, and ask me if I used to black boots for Henri IV. Last year I did earn thirty sous a-day, painting a bridge; you had to lie on your back with the river under you. I have had a cough ever since. But now it's all over, I'm turned out of door everywhere."

He looked down at his poor stiff hands, and added,—

"It's natural enough, for I am good for nothing. They are right enough; I should do the same in their place. What's wrong is, that I'm not dead. Yes, it's my own fault. One ought to lie down and die when one is past work."

"On my word," said Lorilleux, who was listening, "I can't understand why the Government doesn't give some help to the veterans of toil. I read that the other day in a paper."

But Poisson felt bound to stand up for the Government.

"Workmen are not soldiers," he declared. "The Invalides are for soldiers. It's no use asking impossibilities."

Dessert was now served. In the middle there was a Savoy cake in the form of a temple, with a dome composed of slices of melon; and above the dome was planted an artificial rose, near which a butterfly of silver paper balanced itself on the end of a wire. Two drops of gum in the heart of the flower imitated two drops of dew. On the left there

was a piece of cream-cheese on a dish, whilst in another dish on the right there were piles of strawberries, rather squashed, the juice all running out of them. However, there was still some salad left, large lettuce leaves soaked in oil.

"Come, Madame Boche," said Gervaise, in her most amiable manner, "a little more salad. I know you dote upon it."

"No, thanks; no, thanks. I am up to here," replied the *concierge*.

The laundress turned to Virginie, but Virginie stuck her finger into her mouth as if to touch the food.

"I am full up," she said. "There's no more room. I couldn't eat another mouthful."

"Oh! yes, you can with a little pressing," said Gervaise, with a smile. "There's always a little room somewhere. You can eat salad even when you're not hungry. You arn't going to let the lettuce be wasted."

"You can eat it to-morrow pickled," said Madame Lerat. "It is better pickled."

The women sighed, and gazed longingly at the salad. Clémence declared that one day she had eaten three bundles of watercress over her *déjeuner*. Madame Putois was more valiant still; she took the lettuce tops without picking them, and munched them straight away like that. They could all live on salad; eat bucketsful. And with the aid of conversation they finished the salad-bowl.

"I could go on all-fours in a field," declared the *concierge*, with her mouth full.

As for the dessert, it was a mere joke that scarcely counted. It came a little late, but that didn't matter; they would nibble at it all the same. Even if you were to burst like bombs, you couldn't but be equal to a few strawberries and a bit of cake. Besides there was no hurry, they had time enough, the whole night, if need be. Meanwhile the plates were heaped with strawberries and cream-cheese. The men lit their pipes, and as the better wine was done they went back to the ordinary, drinking as they smoked. But Gervaise had to cut the Savoy cake. Poisson, in his most gallant manner, got up and took the rose, which he handed to her in the midst of general applause. She pinned it on the left side of her bodice, the heart side. At every movement she made, the butterfly fluttered.

"I say!" cried Lorilleux, who had just made a discovery, "why, we are eating on your ironing-board. I wonder if so much work was ever done on it before!"

This wicked joke had an immense success. Witty remarks became the order of the day. Clémence could not swallow a spoonful of strawberries without saying that she was working the irons; Madame Lerat pretended that the cream-cheese had a taste of starch; whilst Madame Lorilleux mumbled between her teeth that that was just it; squander your money so fast on the very boards where you have taken such a time to earn them. There was a perfect storm of shouts and laughter.

Suddenly a loud voice imposed silence on the whole assembly. It was Boche, who had risen to his

feet, and had started singing "Le Volcan d'amour, ou le Troupier séduisant," in his most comical and cheeky way.

"C'est moi, Blavin, que je séduis les belles.

A thunder of applause greeted the first verse. Yes, yes, they would have singing. Everyone should sing something. It was awful fun. And they put their elbows on the table, they leaned back in their chairs, nodding their heads at anything specially good, taking a drink with the refrain. The specialty of the creature Boche was his comic songs. He would have sent the water bottle into fits by the way he imitated a Johnny in the army, his fingers stuck out stiff, his cap on the side of his head. After the "Volcan d'amour," he gave the "Baronne de Follebiche," one of his great successes. When he came to the third verse he turned to Clémence, and murmured in a slow, voluptuous voice,—

"La baronne avait du monde,
Mais c'étaient ses quatre sœurs,
Dont trois brunes, l'autre blonde,
Qu'avaient huit-z-yeux ravisseurs."

The whole company rose and joined in the refrain, the men beating time with their heels, the women tapping with their knives on their glasses. They all shouted,—

"Sapristi ! qu'est-ce qui paiera
La goutte à la pa—à la pa—pa— ?
Sapristi ! qu'est-ce qui paiera
La goutte à la pa—à la patrou—ou—ouille ? "

The glass of the windows rattled, the breath of the singers made the muslin curtains quiver. Mean-

while Virginie had slipped out twice, and on coming back had leant over Gervaise to whisper something in her ear. The third time, as she came back in the midst of all the uproar, she said to her,—

"My dear, he is still at François', pretending to read the papers. You may be sure he is up to some mischief."

She spoke of Lantier. It was for him that she was keeping a look-out. At each new tidings Gervaise looked very serious.

"Is he drunk?" she asked Virginie.

"No," she replied. "He is quite sober. That is just the worst part of the business. Why should he stay so long in at the wine-shop if he is sober? Oh Lord! oh Lord! if only something dreadful doesn't happen!"

The laundress, in great agitation, begged her to be quiet. A deep silence had all at once been made. Madame Putois had risen to her feet, and begun to sing "A l'Abordage!" All the guests, silent and attentive, gazed at her; Poisson had even put down his pipe on the edge of the table, so as to hear her better. She stood there stiff and tiny and impassioned, her face pallid under her black cap; she shook her left fist in the air with proud assurance, as she sang in a voice bigger than herself,—

"Qu' un forban téméraire
Nous chasse vent arrière!
Malheur au flibustier!
Pour lui point de quartier!
Enfants, aux caronades!
Rhum à pleines rasades!
Pirates et forbans
Sont gibiers de haubans!"

This was something quite serious. But, damn it all! it gave a good idea of the real thing. Poisson had been to sea, and he wagged his head in approval of the details. All felt, too, that the song was quite in Madame Putois's line. Coupeau leant over to whisper how, one night, in the Rue Poulet, Madame Putois had put to flight four men who had tried to outrage her.

Meanwhile Gervaise, with the aid of old Madame Coupeau, poured out the coffee, though they had not finished eating the Savoy cake. They would not let her sit down; they all declared that it was her turn. She protested, looking so white and uncomfortable, that they asked her if the goose hadn't agreed with her. Thereupon she sang "Ah! laissez-moi dormir!" in a sweet but feeble voice; when she came to the refrain, the longing after slumber peopled with fair dreams, her eyes half closed, and she gazed vaguely into the dark of the street. Immediately afterwards, Poisson, with a stiff inclination of the head, addressed to the ladies, broke into a drinking song, the "Vins de France;" but he sang vilely out of tune, and only the last verse, a patriotic one, went well; speaking of the tricolor flag, he raised his glass on high, held it for a moment, and emptied it at one gulp into his open mouth. Then came the sentimental songs; with something about Venice and gondoliers in the *barcarolle* of Madame Boche, of Seville and the Andalusians in the *bolero* of Madame Lorilleux, whilst Lorilleux went so far as to refer to the perfumes of Araby, apropos of the loves of Fatma, the dancing-girl. Around the heaped table, in the

heavy atmosphere, a very atmosphere of indigestion, there was a glimpse of golden horizons, of necks of ivory, tresses of ebony, kisses beneath the moonlight to the sound of guitars, houris showering a rain of pearls and jewels about their feet as they danced; and the men smoked their pipes meditatively, the women had on their lips a half-unconscious smile of animal ecstacy: all felt themselves transported far away into a perfumed land. When Clémence began to warble "Faites un nid," with a tremolo in her throat, it delighted everybody; it recalled the country, the birds on the wing, the dancing on the green, the flowers with their honeyed breath; in short, it was just like the Bois de Vincennes on a picnic. But Virginie brought back the fun with "Mon petit Riquiqui"; she imitated the *vivandière*, hand on hip, elbow in the air; she pretended to pour out the wine with the other hand, with a turn of the wrist. And this went so well that the whole company begged old Madame Coupeau to sing "La Souris." The old woman refused, swearing she had forgotten the naughty thing. However, she began to sing in her little cracked voice; and her wrinkled face, with its sharp little eyes, brought out all the points, the terrors of Mademoiselle Lise pulling up her petticoats about her at the sight of the mouse. There was a general roar of laughter; the women simply could not keep serious, and they glanced laughingly at their neighbours; it wasn't smutty, after all, there were no naughty words. Boche, to tell the truth, was playing mouse up and down the coal-dealer's calves. Things were in danger of going a little too far, when

Goujet, at a glance from Gervaise, brought back silence and order with the "Adieux d'Abd-el-Kader," which he thundered out in his deep bass voice. It came out of his spreading golden beard as if out of a brass trumpet. When he cried, "O ma noble compagne!" referring to the warrior's sable steed, all hearts beat, and the applause broke out before the song was ended, so sonorously had he uttered the words.

"Now it's your turn, old Bru!" said old Madame Coupeau. "You must sing your song. The older the better, you know."

And they all turned in the direction of the old man, urging and encouraging him. He sat there as if benumbed, looking at them, as if he understood nothing, out of the expressionless mask of his tanned skin. They asked him if he knew the "Cinq voyelles." His head sank lower; he seemed to remember nothing; all the old songs were jumbled together in his old pate. But, as they were giving up in despair, his memory seemed to come to him, and he faltered out in a cavernous voice,—

"Trou la la, trou la la,
Trou la, trou la, trou la la!"

His face lit up, as if the refrain called up in him the recollection of old gaieties, which he gloated over all by himself, listening to the sound of his own voice, now duller and duller, with a sort of childish ecstacy.

"Trou la la, trou la la,
Trou la, trou la, trou la la!"

"I say, my dear," whispered Virginie in the ear

of Gervaise, "you know I've been having a look again. Well, Lantier has gone from François'."

"Did you meet him outside?" asked the laundress.

"No, I walked quickly; I didn't pretend to see him."

But as Virginie raised her eyes, she stopped suddenly, and gave a stifled sigh.

"Oh Lord! there he is, right opposite; he is looking across."

Gervaise, greatly agitated, ventured a glance in that direction. A crowd of people had got together in the street to listen to the singing. The grocer's boys, the tripe-seller, the little watchmaker, formed a group, as if they were looking on at a play. There were some soldiers, men in frock-coats, three little girls of five or six, hand in hand, with an air of solemnity and wonderment. And there in the front rank stood Lantier, looking and listening composedly. Under the circumstances, it was cheek! Gervaise felt a chill strike through her, mounting from her legs to her heart, and she dared not move, while old Bru still went on,—

"Trou la la, trou la la,
Trou la, trou la, trou la la!"

"Come now, old chap, that's enough," said Coupeau. "Do you know the rest of it? You shall sing it to us some other day, when we feel too lively."

There was a laugh, and the old man stopped short, looked all round the table with his pale eyes, and relapsed into his former inanimate condition. The coffee was drunk, and the zinc-worker had called

for more wine. Clémence had started again on the strawberries. For a few moments the singing had ceased; they talked of a woman who had been found hanged that morning in the house adjoining. It was Madame Lerat's turn, but she required many preparations. She dipped the corner of her serviette in a glass of water, and applied it to her forehead because she was too hot. Then she asked for a drop, of brandy, drank it, and wiped her lips slowly.

"L'Enfant du bon Dieu, eh?" she murmured, "L'enfant du bon Dieu . . . ."

And the great mannish woman, with her bony nose and her square military shoulders, began,—

"L'enfant perdu que sa mère abandonne,
Trouve toujours un asile au saint lieu.
Dieu qui le voit le défend de son trône.
L'enfant perdu, c'est l'enfant du bon Dieu."

Her voice trembled on certain words, lingered falteringly; she raised the corners of her eyes towards heaven, whilst she waved her right hand before her chest, and laid it on her heart with an affecting gesture. Gervaise, in a state of agony at seeing Lantier, could not restrain her tears; it seemed to her that the song was telling her own sorrows; that she was this lost child, lost and forsaken, whose defence God was going to take up. Clémence, very drunk, burst into sobs; she laid down her head on the edge of the table, and stifled her hiccups in the table-cloth. There was a silence, in which the air seemed charged with emotion. The women had pulled out their handkerchiefs, and now wiped their

eyes without disguise, as if the feeling did them honour. The men looked at the ground straight before them, blinking their eyelids. Poisson, choking and clenching his teeth, bit two pieces out of his pipe, which he spit out without ceasing to smoke. Boche, who had his hand on the coal-dealer's knee, gave over pinching it, seized with a vague feeling of remorse and respect, whilst two big tears trickled down his cheeks. These jolly dogs were simply as drunk as lords and as tender-hearted as lambs. The wine found its way to their eyes; and when the refrain began, slower and more tearful still, all gave way, and fairly blubbered into their plates, undoing another button to give vent to their tender feelings.

But Gervaise and Virginie, despite themselves, could not take their eyes off the pavement opposite. Madame Boche, in her turn, caught sight of Lantier, and gave a little cry, without ceasing to dabble her face with her tears. Then all three looked at one another anxiously, with an involuntary movement of the head. Good heavens! if Coupeau were only to turn, if Coupeau were only to catch sight of him! What a pitched battle there would be! what a to-do! And they exchanged such looks that presently Coupeau demanded,—

"What are you looking at?"

He looked out and saw Lantier.

"What the hell!" he cried, "this is coming it a bit too strong! Ah, the dirty cad! ah, the dirty cad! No, this is too much! I'll soon put a stop to it!"

And he got up, stuttering out frightful threats. Gervaise in a whisper implored him,—

"Listen to me, please. Put down your knife. Stay where you are; don't do anything rash."

Virginie had to take out of his hands the knife that he had caught up from the table. But she could not hinder him from going outside and going up to Lantier. The company, overcome by its own emotion, saw nothing, weeping louder than ever, whilst Madame Lerat sang with an expression of racking pathos:

"Orpheline, on l'avait perdue,
Et sa voix n'était entendue
Que des grands arbres et du vent."

The last line sounded like the very breath of the storm. Madame Putois, who was about to drink, was so moved that she upset her glass on the cloth. Meanwhile, Gervaise sat as if turned to ice, her hand pressed tightly over her mouth to keep herself from crying out, her eyelids blinking with fright, expecting every second to see one of the two men strike the other to the ground in the middle of the street. Virginie and Madame Boche also followed the scene, profoundly interested. Coupeau, going out into the fresh air, had nearly measured his length in the gutter. as he was making for Lantier. Lantier, his hands in his pockets, had simply stepped aside. And the two men now slanged one another; the zinc-worker especially gave the other a good dressing, called him a filthy pig, talked of eating his tripes. Their voices sounded loud and furious, they made frantic gestures, as if they would whirl their arms off. Gervaise sank

back, closing her eyes; it went on longer than she could endure to look at; it seemed to her that at every moment they would fly at each other's throats, so close were their faces together. Then, hearing nothing more, she opened her eyes again, and sat there stupefied; they were quietly talking to one another.

The voice of Madame Lerat, cooing and lachrymose, was heard in a new verse:

"Le lendemain, à demi morte,
Ou recueillit le pauvre enfant."

"Some women are bitches, no doubt about it," said Madame Lorilleux, to the approval of everyone.

Gervaise exchanged glances with Madame Boche and Virginie. They were making it up, then! Coupeau and Lantier continued their conversation on the edge of the pavement. They still called each other names, but in a friendly way. They said "damned fool" to each other in a tone which was almost amiable. As the people were staring at them, they began to walk up and down, slowly, side by side, along the pavement, turning back again every ten yards. They had struck up a lively conversation. All at once Coupeau seemed to get angry again, whilst the other man refused and held back. And it was the zinc-worker himself who dragged Lantier across the street, and forced him to enter the laundry.

"I tell you I mean it!" he cried. "You shall drink a glass of wine. Men are men, eh? Why shouldn't we be friends?"

Madame Lerat had come to the end of the last

refrain. All the women repeated together, while they twisted their handkerchiefs,—

"L'enfant perdu, c'est l'enfant du bon Dieu."

The singer was much complimented, and she sat down, pretending that she was quite worn out with the exertion. She asked for something to drink, for she threw herself into the sentiment of the song too much, really too much, and she was afraid it was bad for her nerves. Meanwhile all eyes were fixed on Lantier, quietly seated by the side of Coupeau, and already eating the last fragment of the Savoy cake, which he dipped in his wine-glass. With the exception of Virginie and Madame Boche, no one knew him. The Lorilleux scented something in the air, but they had no idea what it was, and they put on a quizzical air. Goujet, who had noticed Gervaise's emotion, looked askance at the new comer. As there was an awkard silence, Coupeau said simply,—

"This is a friend of mine."

Then, turning to his wife,—

"Come, stir your stumps! Is there any more coffee hot?"

Gervaise gazed at them, one after the other, blandly and stupidly. At the first moment, when her husband had pushed her old lover into the shop, she had seized her head in both hands, instinctively, as she did in a thunder-storm, at every peal of thunder. It could never be possible; surely the walls would give way, and bury them all in their ruins! Then, seeing the two men seated there, without so much as a fold of the curtains having shaken, it all suddenly seemed to her quite natural. The goose had not

quite agreed with her; she had certainly eaten too much; and it hindered her from thinking. A pleasant idleness weighed upon her, seemed to nail her there to the edge of the table, wanting nothing, only not to be worried. Good Lord! what was the use of keeping up old grudges when other folk didn't, and things seemed to settle down of themselves to the general satisfaction? She got up and went to see if there was any coffee left.

In the back room the children had fallen asleep. The cross-eyed Augustine had terrorised over them during all the dessert, prigging their strawberries, frightening them with horrible threats. By this time she was very ill, all doubled up on a little stool, quite white, and saying nothing. Fat little Pauline's head had sunk down on Étienne's shoulder; Étienne himself was asleep with his head on the table. Nana was sitting on the edge of the bed, holding Victor close against her, one arm round his neck; and, half asleep, her eyes closed, she said over and over again, in a little weak voice,—

"Oh! mamma, I ain't well; oh! mamma, I ain't well."

"Gracious!" murmured Augustine, whose head rolled to and fro on her shoulders, "they are all tight; they were singing just like grown-ups."

Gervaise had another shock at the sight of Étienne. There was his father close by, eating a piece of cake, without ever having expressed a wish to give the little chap a kiss. She was on the point of awakening Étienne, and bring him over to him. Then, once again, it seemed to her the best thing that, after all,

the matter should have gone off so easily. It would have been out of place to break up the harmony of the dinner, now at the end. She came back with the coffee-pot, and poured out a glass of coffee for Lantier, who appeared to take no notice of her.

"Now it's my turn," said Coupeau, speaking very thick. "Eh! You've been keeping me for the tit-bit. Well, I'll sing you 'Qué cochon d'enfant.'"

"Yes, yes, 'Qué cochon d'enfant!'" cried everybody.

The uproar began again; Lantier was forgotten. The women got their glasses and knives ready, in order to join in the refrain. They laughed beforehand, and gazed expectantly at the zinc-worker, who swayed from foot to foot in a manner of deliberate vulgarity, singing in an old woman's hoarse voice,—

"Tous les matins, quand je m' lève,
J'ai l'cœur sens sus d'sous;
J' l'envoi' chercher contr' la Grève
Un poisson d'quatr' sous.
Il rest' trois quarts d'heure en route,
Et puis, en r' montant,
I' m' lich' la moitié d' ma goutte:
Qué cochon d'enfant!"

And the women, tapping on their glasses, took part in the chorus with roars of laughter,—

"Qué cochon d'enfant!
Qué cochon d'enfant!"

The whole street now joined in, singing with one voice, "Qué cochon d'enfant!" Across the road the little watchmaker, the grocer's boys, the tripe-seller, the fruiterer, who all knew the song, all took up the refrain, slapping themselves in chorus.

The whole street seemed to be drunk; the very smell of the feast had set them all reeling. And it must be said that the party itself was by this time awfully boozed. It had come on little by little, from the first glass of wine after the soup down to now, the finishing touch, when they all bawled together, all crammed with food, in the reddish haze of the two flickering lamps. The sound of this immense jollity deadened the very sound of the last vehicles passing in the street. Two policemen, thinking there was a row, hurried up; but catching sight of Poisson, they gave a little nod, and went on, slowly, side by side, along the shadow of the houses.

Coupeau was at this verse,—

"L'dimanche, à la P'tit'-Villette,
Après la chaleur,
J'allons chez mon oncl' Tinette,
Qu' est maitr' vidangeur,
Pour avoir des noyaux d' c'rise,
En nous en r'tournant.
I' s'roul' dans la marchandise.
Qué cochon d'enfant!
Qué cochon d'enfant!"

At that they fairly raised the roof, and so loud a burst of voices went up into the calm, damp air of the night that they fell to applauding themselves, feeling that that was an effort which it was impossible to beat.

Not one of the company ever remembered exactly how the feast came to an end. It must have been very late, no doubt, for there was not a cat stirring. And it seemed to them that they had danced round the table, hand in hand. It was all a yellow mist,

with leaping crimson faces, grinning from ear to ear. They had certainly drunk sugared wine at the end; only, they were not quite sure if someone had not put salt into the glasses for a joke. The children had apparently undressed and gone to bed by themselves. Next day Madame Boche boasted that she had given two sound boxes on the ear to Boche, finding him chatting in rather too close proximity to the coal-dealer in a corner; but Boche, who had no recollection of it at all, looked on it as a mere bit of fake. What all joined in denouncing was the conduct of Clémence, really a person who ought not to be invited out; she had ended by shewing all she had, and had been so badly upset as to completely ruin one of the muslin curtains. The men, at all events, went outside in the street; Lorilleux and Poisson, seized with qualms in the stomach, had managed to get as far as the pork-butcher's. Good breeding always comes out sooner or later. So, too, the ladies, Madame Putois, Madame Lerat, and Virginie, a little overcome by the heat, had merely gone into the back room to take off their stays; Virginie had even lain down on the bed just for a minute, so as to guard against any consequences. Then the party seemed to have somehow melted away, one after another, all in a body, disappearing into the darkness in a final uproar, a furious quarrel between the Lorilleux, an endless, dreary "trou la la, trou la la," of old Bru. Gervaise fancied that Goujet had burst into sobs on taking leave; Coupeau went on singing; as for Lantier, he must have stayed to the end. She had felt a hot breath against her hair at a certain moment,

but if it came from Lantier or from the hot night air she could not say.

Madame Lerat had declared that she could not get back to Batignolles at that hour, and a mattress was taken out of the bed for her, and laid in a corner of the laundry, after the table had been pushed out of the way. She slept there, in the midst of the leavings of the great feast. And all night long, while the Coupeaus lay slumbering heavily, sleeping off the effects of the dinner, a neighbour's cat, taking advantage of an open window, went steadily to work on what remained of the goose, cracking the bones of the creature with the tiny sound of its sharp teeth.

PHILLIPS ACADEMY
3 1867 00046 7519

DATE DUE

May18'40
Jun12'40
Apr29'41
Nov23'42
Mar1'44
Dec11'57
May18'59
Jan. 8
Jan22 64
Feb5 64
Feb19 64
Mar5 64
Apr19 64
May9 64
Apr14'66
Apr21'66
Apr22'67
MAY 1 - 1973
JUN 5 - 1980
14 '86

WELLS BINDERY
WALTHAM, MASS

47205

843
Z7
v.1